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MRS WYNE.

IN HER 26TH YEAR.

Edinburgh Fraser & Company.
1854

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THE

LIFE AND LETTERS

OF

WILLIAM COWPER.

Edinburgh

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THE WORKS

OF

WILLIAM COWPER.

WITH

A LIFE AND NOTES,

BY

JOHN S. MEMES, LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF CANOVA," "THE HISTORY OF PAINTING, SCULPTURE, AND ARCHITECTURE," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE LETTERS

OF

WILLIAM COWPER.

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131. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

IMPROPRIETY OF TOO FAMILIAR AN APPROACH TO GOD IN OUR DEVOTIONAL EXERCISES.

September 7, 1783.

My dear Friend, — So long a silence needs an apology I have been hindered by a three-weeks' visit from our Hoxton friends, and by a cold and feverish complaint, which are but just removed.

The French poetess is certainly chargeable with the fault you mention, though I thought it not so glaring in the piece I sent you. I have endeavoured, indeed, in all the translations I have made, to cure her of that evil, either by the suppression of passages exceptionable upon that account, or by a more sober and respectful manner of expression. Still, however, she will be found to have conversed familiarly with God, but I hope not fulsomely, nor so as to give reasonable disgust to a religious reader. That God should deal familiarly with man, or, which is the same thing, that he should permit man to deal familiarly with him, seems not very difficult to conceive, or presumptuous to suppose, when some things are taken into consideration. Wo to the sinner that shall dare to take a liberty with him that is not warranted by his word, or to which he himself has not encouraged him! When he assumed man's nature, he revealed himself as the friend of man, as the brother of every soul that loves him. He

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conversed freely with man while he was on earth, and as freely with him after his resurrection. I doubt not, therefore, that it is possible to enjoy an access to him even now unencumbered with ceremonious awe, easy, delightful, and without constraint. This, however, can only be the lot of those who make it the business of their lives to please him, and to cultivate communion with him. And then I presume there can be no danger of offence, because such a habit of the soul is of his own creation, and near as we come, we come no nearer to him than he is pleased to draw us. If we address him as children, it is because he tells us he is our father. If we unbosom ourselves to him as to a friend, it is because he calls us friends; and if we speak to him in the language of love, it is because he first used it, thereby teaching us that it is the language he delights to hear from his people. But I confess that through the weakness, the folly, and corruption of human nature, this privilege, like all other Christian privileges, is liable to abuse. There is a mixture of evil in every thing we do, indulgence encourages us to encroach, and while we exercise the rights of children, we become childish. Here I think is the point in which my authoress failed, and here it is that I have particularly guarded my translation, not afraid of representing her as dealing with God familiarly, but foolishly, irreverently, and without due attention to his majesty, of which she is somewhat guilty,—a wonderful fault for such a woman to fall into, who spent her life in the contemplation of his glory, who seems to have been always impressed with a sense of it, and sometimes quite absorbed by the views she had of it. W. C.

132.—TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

THOUGHTS IN DELIRIUM DISCOVER THE HABITUAL STATE OF THE MIND—ANECDOTE.

September 8, 1783.

My dear Friend,—Mrs Unwin would have answered your kind note from Bedford, had not a pain in her side prevented her. I, who am her secretary upon such occasions, should certainly have answered it for her, but was hindered by illness, having been myself seized with a fever immediately after your departure. The account of your recovery gave us great pleasure, and I am persuaded that you will feel yourself repaid by the information that I give you of mine. The

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reveries your head was filled with, while your disorder was most prevalent, though they were but reveries, and the offspring of a heated imagination, afforded you yet a comfortable evidence of the predominant bias of your heart and mind to the best subjects. I had none such—indeed I was in no degree delirious, nor has any thing less than a fever really dangerous ever made me so. In this respect, if in no other, I may be said to have a strong head; and perhaps for the same reason that wine would never make me drunk, an ordinary degree of fever has no effect upon my understanding. The epidemic begins to be more mortal as the autumn comes on, and in Bedfordshire it is reported, how truly I cannot say, to be nearly as fatal as the plague. I heard lately of a clerk in a public office, whose chief employment it was for many years to administer oaths, who, being light headed in a fever, of which he died, spent the last week of his life in crying day and night,—"So help you God—kiss the book—give me a shilling." What a wretch in comparison with you!

Mr S—— has been ill almost ever since you left us; and last Saturday, as on many foregoing Saturdays, was obliged to clap on a blister by way of preparation for his Sunday labours. He cannot draw breath upon any other terms. If holy orders were always conferred upon such conditions, I question but even bishopricks themselves would want an occupant. But he is easy and cheerful.

I beg you will mention me kindly to Mr Bacon, and make him sensible that if I did not write the paragraph he wished for, it was not owing to any want of respect for the desire he expressed, but to mere inability. If in a state of mind that almost disqualifies me for society, I could possibly wish to form a new connection, I should wish to know him; but I never shall, and things being as they are, I do not regret it. You are my old friend, therefore I do not spare you; having known you in better days, I make you pay for any pleasure I might then afford you, by a communication of my present pains. But I have no claims of this sort upon Mr Bacon.

Be pleased to remember us both, with much affection, to Mrs Newton, and to her and your Eliza; to Miss C—— likewise, if she is with you. Poor Eliza droops and languishes, but in the land to which she is going, she will hold up her head and droop no more. A sickness that leads the way to everlasting life is better than the health of an antediluvian. Accept our united love.—My dear friend, sincerely yours,

W. C.

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133.—TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

SLIGHT INDISPOSITION — AN ABSENT MAN.

September 23, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We are glad that, having been attacked by a fever, which has often proved fatal, and almost always leaves the sufferer debilitated to the last degree, you find yourself so soon restored to health, and your strength recovered. *Your* health and strength are useful to others, and in that view important in *His* account who dispenses both, and by your means a more precious gift than either. For my own part, though I have not been laid up, I have never been perfectly well since you left us. A smart fever, which lasted, indeed, but a few hours, succeeded by lassitude and want of spirits, that seemed still to indicate a feverish habit, has made for some time, and still makes me very unfit for my favourite occupations, writing and reading; so that even a letter, and even a letter to you, is not without its burden.

John ——— has had the epidemic, and has it still, but grows better. When he was first seized with it, he gave notice that he should die, but in this only instance of prophetic exertion, he seems to have been mistaken. He has, however, been very near it. I should have told you, that poor John has been very ready to depart, and much comforted through his whole illness. He, you know, though a silent, has been a very steady professor. He, indeed, fights battles and gains victories, but makes no noise. Europe is not astonished at his feats, foreign academies do not seek him for a member; he will never discover the art of flying, or send a globe of taffeta up to heaven. But he will go thither himself.

Since you went, we dined with Mr———. I had sent him notice of our visit a week before, which, like a contemplative, studious man, as he is, he put in his pocket and forgot. When we arrived, the parlour windows were shut, and the house had the appearance of being uninhabited. After waiting some time, however, the maid opened the door, and the master presented himself. It is hardly worth while to observe so repeatedly, that his garden seems a spot contrived only for the growth of melancholy, but being always affected by it in the same way, I cannot help it. He shewed me a nook, in which he had placed a bench, and where he said he found it very

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refreshing to smoke his pipe and meditate. Here he sits, with his back against one brick wall, and his nose against another, which must, you know, be very refreshing, and greatly assist meditation. He rejoices the more in this niche, because it is an acquisition made at some expense, and with no small labour; several loads of earth were removed in order to make it, which loads of earth, had I the management of them, I should carry thither again, and fill up a place more fit in appearance to be a repository for the dead than the living. I would on no account put any man out of conceit with his innocent enjoyments, and therefore never tell him my thoughts upon this subject, but he is not seldom low-spirited, and I cannot but suspect that his situation helps to make him so.

I shall be obliged to you for Hawkesworth's Voyages, when it can be sent conveniently. The long evenings are beginning, and nothing shortens them so effectually as reading aloud.— Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

134.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

ADVANTAGES OF PHILOSOPHY — FACETIOUS IMPROVEMENT UPON BALLOONS.

September 29, 1783.

My dear William,— We are sorry that you and your household partake so largely of the ill effects of this unhealthy season. You are happy, however, in having hitherto escaped the epidemic fever, which has prevailed much in this part of the kingdom, and carried many off. Your mother and I are well. After more than a fortnight's indisposition, which slight appellation is quite adequate to the description of all I suffered, I am at length restored by a grain or two of emetic tartar. It is a tax I generally pay in autumn. By this time, I hope, a purer ether than we have seen for months, and these brighter suns than the summer had to boast, have cheered your spirits, and made your existence more comfortable. We are rational; but we are animal too, and therefore subject to the influences of the weather. The cattle in the fields shew evident symptoms of lassitude and disgust in an unpleasant season; and we, their lords and masters, are constrained to sympathize with them: the only difference between us is, that they know not the cause of their dejection, and we do, but, for our humiliation, are equally at a loss to cure it. Upon this account I have sometimes wished myself a philosopher.

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How happy, in comparison with myself, does the sagacious investigator of Nature seem, whose fancy is ever employed in the invention of *hypotheses*, and his reason in the support of them! While he is accounting for the origin of the winds, he has no leisure to attend to their influence upon himself; and while he considers what the sun is made of, forgets that he has not shone for a month. One project indeed supplants another. The vortices of Descartes gave way to the gravitation of Newton, and this again is threatened by the electrical fluid of a modern. One generation blows bubbles, and the next breaks them. But in the meantime your philosopher is a happy man. He escapes a thousand inquietudes to which the indolent are subject, and finds his occupation, whether it be the pursuit of a butterfly, or a demonstration, the wholesomest exercise in the world. As he proceeds, he applauds himself. His discoveries, though eventually perhaps they prove but dreams, are to him realities. The world gaze at him, as he does at new phenomena in the heavens, and perhaps understands him as little. But this does not prevent their praises, nor at all disturb him in the enjoyment of that self-complacence, to which his imaginary success entitles him. He wears his honours while he lives, and if another strips them off when he has been dead a century, it is no great matter — he can then make shift without them.

I have said a great deal upon this subject, and know not what it all amounts to. I did not intend a syllable of it when I began. But *currente calamo*, I stumbled upon it. My end is to amuse myself and you. The former of these two points is secured. I shall be happy if I do not miss the latter.

By the way, what is your opinion of these air balloons? I am quite charmed with the discovery. Is it not possible (do you suppose) to convey such a quantity of inflammable air into the stomach and abdomen, that the philosopher, no longer gravitating to a centre, shall ascend by his own comparative levity, and never stop till he has reached the medium exactly *in equilibrio* with himself? May he not, by the help of a pasteboard rudder attached to his posteriors, steer himself in that purer element with ease, and again, by a slow and gradual discharge of his aërial contents, recover his former tendency to the earth, and descend without the smallest danger or inconvenience? These things are worth inquiry; and (I dare say) they will be inquired after as they deserve: The *pennæ non homini datæ* are likely to be less regretted than they were; and perhaps a flight of academicians and

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a covey of fine ladies may be no uncommon spectacle in the next generation. A letter which appeared in the public prints last week convinces me, that the learned are not without hopes of some such improvement upon this discovery. The author is a sensible and ingenious man, and under a reasonable apprehension that the ignorant may feel themselves inclined to laugh upon a subject that affects himself with the utmost seriousness, with much good manners and management bespeaks their patience, suggesting many good consequences that may result from a course of experiments upon this machine, and amongst others, that it may be of use in ascertaining the shape of continents and islands, and the face of wide-extended and far distant countries; an end not to be hoped for, unless, by these means of extraordinary elevation, the human prospect may be immensely enlarged, and the philosopher, exalted to the skies, attain a view of the whole hemisphere at once. But whether he is to ascend by the mere inflation of his person, as hinted above, or whether in a sort of band-box, supported upon balloons, is not yet apparent, nor, I suppose, even in his own idea perfectly decided.—. Yours, my dear William, W. C.

135.—TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

INCIDENTAL EVILS OF CHRISTIANITY OCCASIONED BY OVERZEAL OR INDIFFERENCE IN PROFESSORS.

October 6, 1783.

My dear Friend,—It is indeed a melancholy consideration, that the Gospel, whose direct tendency is to promote the happiness of mankind in the present life, as well as in the life to come, and which so effectually answers the design of its author, whenever it is well understood and sincerely believed, should, through the ignorance, the bigotry, the superstition of its professors, and the ambition of popes, and princes, the tools of popes, have produced incidentally so much mischief; only furnishing the world with a plausible excuse to worry each other, while they sanctified the worse cause with the specious pretext of zeal for the furtherance of the best.

Angels descend from heaven to publish peace between man and his Maker—the Prince of Peace himself comes to confirm and establish it, and war, hatred, and desolation are

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the consequence. Thousands quarrel about the interpretation of a book which none of them understand. He that is slain dies firmly persuaded that the crown of martyrdom expects him; and he that slew him is equally convinced that he has done God service. In reality they are both mistaken, and equally unentitled to the honour they arrogate to themselves. If a multitude of blind men should set out for a certain city, and dispute about the right road till a battle ensued between them, the probable effect would be that none of them would ever reach it; and such a fray, preposterous and shocking in the extreme, would exhibit a picture in some degree resembling the original of which we have been speaking. And why is not the world thus occupied at present? even because they have exchanged a zeal, that was no better than madness, for an indifference equally pitiable and absurd. The Holy Sepulchre has lost its importance in the eyes of nations called Christian, not because the light of true wisdom has delivered them from a superstitious attachment to the spot, but because He that was buried in it is no longer regarded by them as the Saviour of the world. The exercise of reason, enlightened by philosophy, has cured them indeed of the misery of an abused understanding, but together with the delusion they have lost the substance, and for the sake of the lies that were grafted upon it, have quarreled with the truth itself. Here then we see the *ne plus ultrà* of human wisdom, at least in affairs of religion. It enlightens the mind with respect to nonessentials, but with respect to that in which the essence of Christianity consists, leaves it perfectly in the dark. It can discover many errors that in different ages have disgraced the faith; but it is only to make way for the admission of one more fatal than them all, which represents that faith itself as a delusion. Why those evils have been permitted, shall be known hereafter. One thing in the meantime is certain, that the folly and frenzy of the professed disciples of the Gospel have been more dangerous to its interests, than all the avowed hostilities of its adversaries; and perhaps for this cause these mischiefs might be suffered to prevail for a season, that its divine original and nature might be the more illustrated, when it should appear that it was able to stand its ground for ages against that most formidable of all attacks, the indiscretion of its friends. The outrages that have followed this perversion of the truth have proved indeed a stumbling-block to individuals; the wise of this world, with all their wisdom, have not been able to distinguish between the

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blessing and the abuse of it. Voltaire was offended, and Gibbon has turned his back; but the flock of Christ is still nourished, and still increases, notwithstanding the unbelief of a philosopher is able to convert bread into a stone, and a fish into a serpent.

I am much obliged to you for the Voyages, which I received, and began to read last night. My imagination is so captivated upon these occasions, that I seem to partake with the navigators in all the dangers they encountered. I lose my anchor; my mainsail is rent into shreds; I kill a shark, and by signs converse with a Patagonian, and all this without moving from the fireside. The principal fruits of these circuits that have been made around the globe, seem likely to be the amusement of those that staid at home. Discoveries have been made, but such discoveries as will hardly satisfy the expense of such undertakings. We brought away an Indian, and having debauched him, we sent him home again to communicate the infection to his country,—fine sport, to be sure, but such as will not defray the cost. Nations that live upon bread-fruit, and have no mines to make them worthy of our acquaintance, will be but little visited for the future. So much the better for them! their poverty is indeed their mercy.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

136.—TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

UNHAPPY SITUATION OF THE AMERICAN LOYALISTS—BRITISH CHARITY TOO OFTEN FOREIGN IN APPLICATION.

October, 1783.

My dear Friend,—I am much obliged to you for your American anecdotes, and feel the obligation perhaps more sensibly, the labour of transcribing being in particular that to which I myself have the greatest aversion. The Loyalists are much to be pitied: driven from all the comforts that depend upon and are intimately connected with a residence in their native land, and sent to cultivate a distant one, without the means of doing it—abandoned, too, through a deplorable necessity, by the government to which they have sacrificed all,—they exhibit a spectacle of distress, which one cannot view, even at this distance, without participating in what they feel. Why could not some of our useless wastes and forests have been alloted to their support? To have built them houses indeed, furnished them with implements of husbandry,

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would have put us to no small expense; but I suppose the increase of population, and the improvement of the soil, would soon have been felt as a national advantage, and have indemnified the state, if not enriched it. We are bountiful to foreigners, and neglect those of our own household. I remember that compassionating the miseries of the Portuguese, at the time of the Lisbon earthquake, we sent them a ship load of tools to clear away the rubbish with, and to assist them in rebuilding the city. I remember, too, it was reported at the time, that the court of Portugal accepted our wheelbarrows and spades with a very ill grace, and treated our bounty with contempt. An act like this in behalf of our brethren, carried only a little farther, might possibly have redeemed them from ruin, have resulted in emolument to ourselves, have been received with joy, and repaid with gratitude. Such are my speculations upon the subject, who not being a politician by profession, and very seldom giving my attention for a moment to such a matter, may not be aware of difficulties and objections, which they of the cabinet can discern with half an eye. Perhaps to have taken under our protection a race of men proscribed by the Congress might be thought dangerous to the interests we hope to have hereafter in their high and mighty regards and affections. It is ever the way of those who rule the earth, to leave out of their reckoning Him who rules the universe. They forget that the poor have a friend more powerful to avenge, than they can be to oppress, and that treachery and perfidy must therefore prove bad policy in the end. The Americans themselves appear to me to be in a situation little less pitiable than that of the deserted Loyalists. Their fears of arbitrary imposition were certainly well founded. A struggle therefore might be necessary, in order to prevent it, and this end might surely have been answered without a renunciation of dependence. But the passions of a whole people, once put in motion, are not soon quieted. Contest begets aversion, a little success inspires more ambitious hopes, and thus a slight quarrel terminates at last in a breach never to be healed, and perhaps in the ruin of both parties. It does not seem likely, that a country so distinguished by the Creator with every thing that can make it desirable, should be given up to desolation for ever; and they possibly may have reason on their side, who suppose that in time it will have the pre-eminence over all others; but the day of such prosperity seems far distant — Omnipotence indeed can hasten it, and it may dawn when it is least expected. But we govern ourselves in

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all our reasonings by present appearances. Persons at least no better informed than myself are constrained to do so.

I intended to have taken another subject when I began, and I wish I had. No man living is less qualified to settle nations than I am; but when I write to you, I talk, that is, I write as fast as my pen can run, and on this occasion it ran away with me. I acknowledge myself in your debt for your last favour, but cannot pay you now, unless you will accept as payment, what I know you value more than all I can say beside, the most unfeigned assurances of my affection for you and yours, — Yours, &c. W. C.

137. — TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

NOTE REQUESTING COOK'S VOYAGES — COMFORTS OF WINTER EVENINGS' READING.

October 20, 1783.

I SHOULD not have been thus long silent, had I known with certainty where a letter of mine might find you. Your summer excursions, however, are now at an end, and addressing a line to you in the centre of the busy scene, in which you spend your winter, I am pretty sure of my mark.

I see the winter approaching without much concern, though a passionate lover of fine weather, and the pleasant scenes of summer; but the long evenings have their comforts too, and there is hardly to be found upon the earth, I suppose, so snug a creature as an Englishman by his fireside in the winter. I mean, however, an Englishman that lives in the country, for in London it is not very easy to avoid intrusion. I have two ladies* to read to, sometimes more, but never less — at present we are circumnavigating the globe, and I find the old story with which I amused myself some years since, through the great felicity of a memory not very retentive, almost new. I am, however, sadly at a loss for Cook's Voyage — can you send it? I shall be glad of Foster's too.† These together will make the winter pass merrily, and you will much oblige me.

W. C.

* Lady Austen and Mrs Unwin.

† There were two Fosters, father and son. Both sailed as naturalists with Captain Cook, and both have written accounts of the voyage.

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138. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

NEGLECT OF FRIENDS — PLEASURES OF WALKING — FIRE IN OLNEY.

November 10, 1783.

My dear William, — I have lost and wasted almost all my writing time, in making an alteration in the verses I either close or subjoin, for I know not which will be the case at present.* If prose comes readily, I shall transcribe them on another sheet, otherwise, on this. You will understand, before you have read many of them, that they are not for the press. I lay you under no other injunctions. The unkind behaviour of our acquaintance, though it is possible that in some instances it may not much affect our happiness, nor engage many of our thoughts, will sometimes obtrude itself upon us, with a degree of importunity not easily resisted; and then perhaps, though almost insensible of it before, we feel more than the occasion will justify. In such a moment it was that I conceived this poem, and gave loose to a degree of resentment which perhaps I ought not to have indulged, but which in a cooler hour I cannot altogether condemn. My former intimacy with the two characters was such, that I could not but feel myself provoked by the neglect with which they both treated me on a late occasion. So much by way of preface.

You ought not to have supposed, that if you had visited us last summer, the pleasure of the interview would have been all your own. By such an imagination, you wrong both yourself and us. Do you suppose we do not love you? You cannot suspect your mother of coldness; and as to me, assure yourself I have no friend in the world with whom I communicate without the least reserve, yourself excepted. Take heart then, and when you find a favourable opportunity to come, assure yourself of such a welcome from us both, as you have a right to look for. But I have observed in your two last letters, somewhat of a dejection and melancholy, that I am afraid you do not sufficiently strive against. I suspect you of being too sedentary. "You cannot walk." Why you cannot is best known to yourself. I am sure your legs are long enough, and your person does not overload them. But I beseech you ride, and ride often. I think I have heard you say, you

* Verses from a poem entitled *Valediction*. See Poems.

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cannot even do that without an object. Is not health an object? Is not a new prospect, which in most countries is gained at the end of every mile, an object? Assure yourself that easy chairs are no friends to cheerfulness; and that a long winter spent by the fireside, is a prelude to an unhealthy spring. Every thing I see in the fields, is to me an object, and I can look at the same rivulet, or at a handsome tree, every day of my life, with new pleasure. This, indeed, is partly the effect of a natural taste for rural beauty, and partly the effect of habit; for I never in all my life have let slip the opportunity of breathing fresh air, and of conversing with Nature, when I could fairly catch it. I earnestly recommend a cultivation of the same taste to you, suspecting that you have neglected it, and suffer for doing so.

Last Saturday se'ennight, the moment I had composed myself in my bed, your mother, too, having just got into hers, we were alarmed by a cry of fire on the staircase. I immediately rose, and saw sheets of flame above the roof of Mr Palmer's house, our opposite neighbour. The mischief, however, was not so near to him as it seemed to be, having begun at a butcher's yard, at a little distance. We made all haste down stairs, and soon threw open the street door, for the reception of as much lumber, of all sorts, as our house would hold, brought into it by several who thought it necessary to move their furniture. In two hours time we had so much that we could hold no more, even the uninhabited part of our building being filled. Not that we ourselves were entirely secure — an adjoining thatch, on which fell showers of sparks, being rather a dangerous neighbour. Providentially, however, the night was perfectly calm, and we escaped. By four in the morning it was extinguished, having consumed many outbuildings, but no dwelling house. Your mother suffered a little in her health, from the fatigue and bustle of the night, but soon recovered. As for me, it hurt me not. The slightest wind would have carried the fire to the very extremity of the town, there being multitudes of thatched buildings and faggot piles so near to each other, that they must have proved infallible conductors.

The balloons prosper: I congratulate you upon it. Thanks to Montgolfier,* we shall fly at last.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

* The two brothers Montgolfier made their first successful experiment with a rarified air balloon some months previous to the date of this letter, at Annonai in France.

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139. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

RANK NO EXCUSE FOR CONTEMPTUOUS NEGLIGENCE—L'ESTRANGE'S JOSEPHUS — SIMPLICITY IN HISTORICAL WRITING.

November 24, 1783.

My dear William,—An evening unexpectedly retired, and which your mother and I spend without company, (an occurrence far from frequent,) affords me a favourable opportunity to write by to-morrow's post, which else I could not have found. You are very good to consider my literary necessities with so much attention, and I feel proportionably grateful. Blair's Lectures (though I suppose they must make a part of my private studies, not being *ad captum fœminarum*,) will be perfectly welcome. You say you felt my verses; I assure you that, in this, you followed my example; for I felt them first. A man's lordship is nothing to me, any farther than in connection with qualities that entitle him to my respect. If he thinks himself privileged by it to treat me with neglect, I am his humble servant, and shall never be at a loss to render him an equivalent. I will not, however, belie my knowledge of mankind so much, as to seem surprised at a treatment which I had abundant reason to expect. To these men, with whom I was once intimate, and for many years, I am no longer necessary, no longer convenient, or in any respect an object. They think of me as of the man in the moon, and whether I have a lantern, or a dog and faggot, or whether I have neither of those desirable accommodations, is to them a matter of perfect indifference: upon that point we are agreed, our indifference is mutual, and were I to publish again, which is not impossible, I should give them a proof of it.

L'Estrange's Josephus has lately furnished us with evening lectures. But the historian is so tediously circumstantial, and the translator so insupportably coarse and vulgar, that we are all three weary of him. How would Tacitus have shone upon such a subject, great master as he was of the art of description, concise without obscurity, and affecting without being poetical. But so it was ordered, and for wise reasons no doubt, that the greatest calamities any people ever suffered, and an accomplishment of one of the most signal prophecies in the Scripture, should be recorded by one of the worst writers. The man was a temporizer too, and

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courted the favour of his Roman masters at the expense of his own creed, or else an infidel, and absolutely disbelieved it. You will think me very difficult to please; I quarrel with Josephus for the want of elegance, and with some of our modern historians for having too much. With him, for running right forward like a Gazette, without stopping to make a single observation by the way; and with them, for pretending to delineate characters that existed two thousand years ago, and to discover the motives by which they were influenced, with the same precision as if they had been their contemporaries. Simplicity is become a very rare quality in a writer. In the decline of great kingdoms, and where refinement in all the arts is carried to an excess, I suppose it is always rare. The latter Roman writers are remarkable for false ornament, they were yet no doubt admired by the readers of their own day; and with respect to authors of the present era, the most popular among them appear to me equally censurable on the same account. Swift and Addison were simple.

Your mother wants room for a postscript, so my lecture must conclude abruptly. — Yours, W. C.

140. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

VISIT TO MR AND MRS THROCKMORTON — A BALLOON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — It is hard upon us striplings who have uncles still living, (N.B. I myself have an uncle still alive,) that those venerable gentlemen should stand in our way, even when the ladies are in question; that I, for instance, should find in one page of your letter a hope that Miss Shuttleworth would be of your party, and be told in the next that she is engaged to your uncle. Well, we may perhaps never be uncles, but we may reasonably hope that the time is coming, when others, as young as we are now, shall envy us the privileges of old age, and see us engross that share in the attention of the ladies to which their youth must aspire in vain. Make our compliments if you please to your sister Eliza, and tell her that we are both mortified at having missed the pleasure of seeing her.

Balloons are so much the mode, that even in this country we have attempted a balloon. You may possibly remember that at a place called Weston, a little more than a mile from Olney, there lives a family, whose name is Throckmorton.

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The present possessor of the estate is a young man whom I remember a boy. He has a wife, who is young, genteel, and handsome. They are Papists, but much more amiable than many Protestants. We never had any intercourse with the family, though ever since we lived here we have enjoyed the range of their pleasure grounds, having been favoured with a key, which admits us into all. When this man succeeded to the estate, on the death of his elder brother, and came to settle at Weston, I sent him a complimentary card, requesting the continuance of that privilege, having till then enjoyed it by favour of his mother, who on that occasion went to finish her days at Bath. You may conclude that he granted it, and for about two years nothing more passed between us. A fortnight ago, I received an invitation in the civilest terms, in which he told me that the next day he should attempt to fill a balloon, and if it would be any pleasure to me to be present, should be happy to see me. Your mother and I went. The whole country were there, but the balloon could not be filled. The endeavour was, I believe, very philosophically made, but such a process depends for its success upon such niceties as make it very precarious. Our reception was, however, flattering to a great degree, insomuch that more notice seemed to be taken of us than we could possibly have expected, indeed rather more than of any of his other guests. They even seemed anxious to recommend themselves to our regards. We drank chocolate, and were asked to dine, but were engaged. A day or two afterwards, Mrs Unwin and I walked that way, and were overtaken in a shower. I found a tree that I thought would shelter us both, a large elm, in a grove that fronts the mansion. Mrs T. observed us, and running towards us in the rain, insisted on our walking in. He was gone out. We sat chatting with her till the weather cleared up, and then at her instance took a walk with her in the garden. The garden is almost their only walk, and is certainly their only retreat in which they are not liable to interruption. She offered us a key of it in a manner that made it impossible not to accept it, and said she would send us one. A few days afterwards in the cool of the evening we walked that way again. We saw them going toward the house, and exchanged bows and curtsies at a distance, but did not join them. In a few minutes, when we had passed the house, and had almost reached the gate that opens out of the park into the adjoining field, I heard the iron gate belonging to the courtyard ring, and saw Mr T. advancing hastily towards us; we made equal haste to meet

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This is indeed an author's letter; but it is an author's letter to his friend. If you will be the friend of an author, you must expect such letters. Come July, and come yourself, with as many of your exterior selves as can possibly come with you.

Yours, my dear William, affectionately, and with your mother's remembrances. Adieu, W. C.

160. — TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

DR JOHNSON'S FAVOURABLE OPINION OF HIS POEMS.

May 22, 1784.

My dear Friend, — I am glad to have received at last an account of Dr Johnson's favourable opinion of my book. I thought it wanting, and had long since concluded, that, not having had the happiness to please him, I owed my ignorance of his sentiments to the tenderness of my friends at Hoxton, who would not mortify me with an account of his disapprobation. It occurs to me that I owe him thanks for interposing between me and the resentment of the Reviewers, who seldom show mercy to an advocate for evangelical truth, whether in prose or verse. I therefore enclose a short acknowledgment, which, if you see no impropriety in the measure, you can, I imagine, without much difficulty convey to him through the hands of Mr Latrobe. If on any account you judge it an inexpedient step, you can very easily suppress the letter.

I pity Mr Bull. What harder task can any man undertake than the management of those, who have reached the age of manhood without having ever felt the force of authority, or passed through any of the preparatory parts of education? I had either forgot, or never adverted to the circumstance, that his disciples were to be men. At present, however, I am not surprised that, being such, they are found disobedient, intractable, insolent, and conceited, — qualities that generally prevail in the minds of adults in exact proportion to their ignorance. He dined with us since I received your last. It was on Thursday that he was here. He came dejected, burdened, full of complaints. But we sent him away cheerful. He is very sensible of the prudence, delicacy, and attention to his character, which the society have discovered in their conduct towards him upon this occasion; and indeed it does them honour: for it were past all enduring, if a charge of insufficiency should obtain a moment's regard, when brought

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by five such coxcombs against a man of his erudition and ability. Lady Austen is gone to Bath.—Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

161.—TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

THE SAME SUBJECT.

June 5, 1784.

When you told me that the critique upon my volume was written, though not by Dr Johnson himself, yet by a friend of his, to whom he recommended the book and the business, I inferred from that expression that I was indebted to him for an active interposition in my favour, and consequently that he had a right to thanks. But now I concur entirely in sentiment with you, and heartily second your vote for the suppression of thanks which do not seem to be much called for. Yet even now, were it possible that I could fall into his company, I should not think a slight acknowledgment misapplied. I was no other way anxious about his opinion, nor could be so, after you and some others had given a favourable one, than it was natural I should be, knowing, as I did, that his opinion had been consulted.—I am affectionately yours, W. C.

162.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

RESUMPTION OF HIS CLASSICAL STUDIES—TAXATION.

July 3, 1784

My dear William,—We rejoice that you had a safe journey, and though we should have rejoiced still more had you had no occasion for a physician, we are glad that having had need of one, you had the good fortune to find him. Let us hear soon that his advice has proved effectual, and that you are delivered from all ill symptoms.

Thanks for the care you have taken to furnish me with a dictionary. It is rather strange that at my time of life, and after a youth spent in classical pursuits, I should want one; and stranger still that, being possessed at present of only one Latin author in the world, I should think it worth while to purchase one. I say that it is strange, and indeed I think it so myself. But I have thought that when my present labours of the pen are ended, I may go to school again, and refresh my spirits by a little intercourse with the Mantuan and the Sabine bard, and perhaps by a reperusal of some others, whose

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him, he presented to us the key, which I told him I esteemed a singular favour, and after a few such speeches as are made on such occasions, we parted. This happened about a week ago. I concluded nothing less, than that all this civility and attention was designed on their part as a prelude to a nearer acquaintance; but here at present the matter rests. I should like exceedingly to be on an easy footing there, to give a morning call now and then, and to receive one, but nothing more. For though he is one of the most agreeable men I ever saw, I could not wish to visit him in any other way; neither our house, furniture, servants, or income, being such as qualify us to make entertainments, neither would I on any account be introduced to the neighbouring gentry. Mr T. is altogether a man of fashion, and respectable on every account.

I have told you a long story. Farewell. We number the days as they pass, and are glad that we shall see you and your sister soon.—Yours, &c. W. C.

141.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

DEARTH OF EPISTOLARY MATTER—EAST INDIA CHARTER OUGHT TO BE REPEALED.

January 3, 1784.

My dear William,—Your silence began to be distressing to both your mother and me, and had I not received a letter from you last night, I should have written by this post to inquire after your health. How can it it be, that you, who are not stationary like me, but often change your situation, and mix with a variety of company, should suppose me furnished with such abundant materials, and yourself destitute? I assure you faithfully, that I do not find the soil of Olney prolific in the growth of such articles as make letter-writing a desirable employment. No place contributes less to the catalogue of incidents, or is more scantily supplied with anecdotes worth notice.

We have

> One parson, one poet, one belman, one crier,
> And the poor poet is our only squire.

Guess, then, if I have not more reason to expect two letters from you, than you one from me. The principal occurrence, and that which affects me most at present, came to pass this moment. The stair-foot door, being swelled by the thaw,

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would do any thing better than it would open. An attempt to force it upon that office has been attended with such a horrible dissolution of its parts, that we were immediately obliged to introduce a chirurgeon, commonly called a carpenter, whose applications we have some hope will cure it of a locked jaw, and heal its numerous fractures. His medicines are powerful chalybeates, and a certain glutinous salve, which he tells me is made of the tails and ears of animals. The consequences, however, are rather unfavourable to my present employment, which does not well brook noise, bustle, and interruption.

This being the case, I shall not perhaps be either so perspicuous, or so diffuse, on the subject of which you desire my sentiments, as I should be, but I will do my best. Know then that I have learnt long since of Abbé Raynal,* to hate all monopolies, as injurious, howsoever managed, to the interests of commerce at large: consequently the charter in question would not at any rate be a favourite of mine. This, however, is of itself, I confess, no sufficient reason to justify the resumption of it. But such reasons I think are not wanting. A grant of that kind, it is well known, is always forfeited by the nonperformance of the conditions. And why not equally forfeited, if those conditions are exceeded, if the design of it be perverted, and its operation extended to objects which were never in the contemplation of the donor? This appears to me to be no misrepresentation of their case, whose charter is supposed to be in danger. It constitutes them a trading company, and gives them an exclusive right to traffic to the East Indies. But it does no more. It invests them with no sovereignty; it does not convey to them the royal prerogetive of making war and peace, which the king cannot alienate if he would. But this prerogative they have exercised, and, forgetting the terms of their institution, have possessed themselves of an immense territory, which they have ruled with a rod of iron, to which it is impossible they should even have a right, unless such a one as it is a disgrace to plead,—the right of conquest. The potentates of this country they dash in pieces like a potter's vessel, as often as they please, making the happiness of thirty millions of mankind a consideration subordinate to that of their own emolument, oppressing them as often as it may serve a lucrative purpose, and in no instance, that I have ever heard, consulting their

* At this time, the Abbé Raynal was an exile from France, whence he had been banished for his *History of the Indies*. He was born in 1713, and died 1796.

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interest or advantage. That government therefore is bound to interfere, and to unking these tyrants, is to me self-evident. And if, having subjugated so much of this miserable world, it is therefore necessary that we must keep possession of it, it appears to me a duty so binding on the legislature to resume it from the hands of those usurpers, that I should think a curse, and a bitter one, must follow the neglect of it. But suppose this were done, can they be legally deprived of their charter? In truth I think so. If the abuse and perversion of a charter can amount to a defeasance of it, never were they so grossly palpable as in this instance; never was charter so justly forfeited. Neither am I at all afraid that such a measure should be drawn into a precedent, unless it could be alleged as a sufficient reason for not hanging a rogue, that perhaps magistracy might grow wanton in the exercise of such a power, and now and then hang up an honest man for its amusement. When the governors of the Bank shall have deserved the same severity, I hope they will meet with it. In the meantime, I do not think them a whit more in jeopardy because a corporation of plunderers have been brought to justice.

We are well, and love you all. I never wrote in such a hurry, nor in such disturbance. Pardon the effects, and believe me yours affectionately, W. C.

142.—TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

REFLECTIONS ON THE END OF THE OLD AND BEGINNING OF A NEW YEAR.

January 18, 1784.

My dear Friend,—I too have taken leave of the old year, and parted with it just when you did, but with very different sentiments and feelings upon the occasion. I looked back upon all the passages and occurrences of it, as a traveller looks back upon a wilderness, through which he has past with weariness and sorrow of heart, reaping no other fruit of his labour than the poor consolation that, dreary as the desert was, he has left it all behind him. The traveller would even find this comfort considerably lessened, if, as soon as he had passed one wilderness, another of equal length, and equally desolate, should expect him. In this particular, his experience and mine would exactly tally. I should rejoice indeed that the old year is over and gone, if I had not every reason to prophesy a new one similar to it.

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I am glad you have found so much hidden treasure; and Mrs Unwin desires me to tell you that you did her no more than justice, in believing that she would rejoice in it. It is not easy to surmise the reason, why the reverend doctor, your predecessor, concealed it. Being a subject of a free government, and I suppose full of the divinity most in fashion, he could not fear lest his great riches should expose him to persecution. Nor can I suppose that he held it any disgrace for a dignitary of the church to be wealthy, at a time when churchmen in general spare no pains to become so. But the wisdom of some men has a droll sort of knavishness in it, much like that of the magpie, who hides what he finds with a deal of contrivance, merely for the pleasure of doing it. — Yours, W. C.

143. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

TRANSLATION OF LATIN VERSES OF DR JORTIN — STATE OF DEPARTED SPIRITS — CHARITIES.

January 3, 1784.

My dear William, — When I first resolved to write an answer to your last this evening, I had no thought of any thing more sublime than prose. But before I began, it occurred to me that perhaps you would not be displeased with an attempt to give a poetical translation of the lines you sent me. They are so beautiful, that I felt the temptation irresistible. At least, as the French say, it was *plus forte que moi;* and I accordingly complied. By this means I have lost an hour; and whether I shall be able to fill my sheet before supper, is as yet doubtful; but I will do my best.

For your remarks, I think them perfectly just. You have no reason to distrust your taste, or to submit the trial of it to me. You understand the use and the force of language as well as any man. You have quick feelings, and you are fond of poetry. How is it possible then that you should not be a judge of it? I venture to hazard only one alteration, which, as it appears to me, would amount to a little improvement. The seventh and eighth lines I think I should like better thus, —

> Aspirante levi zephyro et redeunte serenâ
> Anni temperie, fœcundo è cespite surgunt.

My reason is, that the word *cum* is repeated too soon. At least my ear does not like it; and when it can be done without injury to the sense, there seems to me to be an elegance in

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diversifying the expression, as much as possible, upon similar occasions. It discovers a command of phrase, and gives a more masterly air to the piece. If *extincta* stood unconnected with *telis*, I should prefer your word *micant* to the doctor's *vigent*. But the latter seems to stand more in direct opposition to that sort of extinction which is effected by a shaft or arrow. In the day-time the stars may be said to die, and in the night to recover their strength. Perhaps the doctor had in his eye that noble line of Gray,—

Hyperion's march they spy, and glitt'ring shafts of war!

But it is a beautiful composition. It is tender, touching, and elegant. It is not easy to do justice in English, as for example. *

Many thanks for the books, which, being most admirably packed, came safe. They will furnish us with many a winter evening's amusement. We are glad that you intend to be the carrier back.

We rejoice, too, that your cousin has remembered you in her will. The money she left to those who attended her hearse would have been better bestowed upon you; and by this time perhaps she thinks so. Alas! what an inquiry does that thought suggest, and how impossible to make it to any purpose! What are the employments of the departed spirit? and where does it subsist? Has it any cognizance of earthly things? Is it transported to an immeasurable distance; or is it still, though imperceptible to us, conversant with the same scene, and interested in what passes here? How little we know of a state to which we are all destined; and how does the obscurity, that hangs over that undiscovered country, increase the anxiety we sometimes feel as we are journeying towards it! It is sufficient, however, for such as you, and a few more of my acquaintance, to know, that in your separate state you will be happy. Provision is made for your reception, and you will have no cause to regret aught that you have left behind.

I have written to Mr ———.† My letter went this morning. How I love and honour that man! For many reasons I dare not tell him how much. But I hate the frigidity of the style in which I am forced to address him. That line of Horace, —

Dii tibi divitias dederunt artemque fruendi,

was never so applicable to the poet's friend as to Mr———

* The verses appear at the conclusion of next letter. † Thornton.

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My bosom burns to immortalize him. But prudence says, "Forbear!" and, though a poet, I pay respect to her injunctions.

I sincerely give you joy of the good you have unconsciously done by your example and conversation. That you seem to yourself not to deserve the acknowledgment your friend makes of it, is a proof that you do. Grace is blind to its own beauty, whereas such virtues as men may reach without it, are remarkable self-admirers. May you make such impressions upon many of your order! I know none that need them more.

You do not want my praises of your conduct towards Mr ———. It is well for him, however, and still better for yourself, that you are capable of such a part. It was said of some good man, (my memory does not serve me with his name,) "Do him an ill turn, and you make him your friend for ever." But it is Christianity only that forms such friends. I wish his father may be duly affected by this instance and proof of your superiority to those ideas of you which he has so unreasonably harboured. He is not in my favour now, nor will be upon any other terms.

I laughed at the comments you make on your own feelings, when the subject of them was a newspaper eulogium. But it was a laugh of pleasure and approbation: such indeed is the heart, and so is it made up. There are few that can do good and keep their own secret, none perhaps without a struggle. Yourself, and your friend ———, are no very common instances of the fortitude that is necessary in such a conflict. In former days, I have felt my heart beat, and every vein throb, upon such an occasion. To publish my own deed was wrong — I knew it to be so — but to conceal it, seemed like a voluntary injury to myself. Sometimes I could, and sometimes I could not succeed. My occasions for such conflicts indeed were not very numerous. — Yours, W. C.

144. — TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

EAST INDIA CHARTER — JORTIN'S LINES.

January 25, 1784.

My dear Friend, — This contention about East Indian patronage seems not unlikely to avenge upon us, by its consequences, the mischiefs we have done there. The matter in dispute is too precious to be relinquished by either party;

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and each is jealous of the influence the other would derive from the possession of it. In a country whose politics have so long rolled upon the wheels of corruption, an affair of such value must prove a weight in either scale absolutely destructive of the very idea of a balance. Every man has his sentiments upon this subject, and I have mine. Were I constituted umpire of this strife, with full powers to decide it, I would tie a talent of lead about the neck of this patronage, and plunge it into the depths of the sea. To speak less figuratively, I would abandon all territorial interest in a country to which we can have no right, and which we cannot govern with any security to the happiness of the inhabitants, or without the danger of incurring either perpetual broils, or the most insupportable tyranny at home. That sort of tyranny, I mean, which flatters and tantalizes the subject with a show of freedom, and in reality allows him nothing more; bribing to the right and left, rich enough to afford the purchase of a thousand consciences, and consequently strong enough, if it happen to meet with an incorruptible one, to render all the efforts of that man, or of twenty such men, if they could be found, romantic, and of no effect. I am the king's most loyal subject, and most obedient humble servant. But, by his majesty's leave, I must acknowledge I am not altogether convinced of the rectitude even of his own measures, or the simplicity of his views; and if I were satisfied that he himself is to be trusted, it is nevertheless palpable, that he cannot answer for his successors. At the same time, he is my king, and I reverence him as such. I account his prerogative sacred, and shall never wish prosperity to a party that invades it, and that, under the pretence of patriotism, would annihilate all the consequence of a character essential to the very being of the constitution. For these reasons, I am sorry that we have any dominion in the East—that we have any such emoluments to contend about. Their immense value will probably prolong the dispute, and such struggles having been already made in the conduct of it, as have shaken our very foundations, it seems not unreasonable to suppose that still greater efforts, and more fatal, are behind; and after all, the decision in favour of either side may be ruinous to the whole. In the meantime, that the Company themselves are but indifferently qualified for the kingship, is most deplorably evident. What shall I say, therefore? I distrust the court, I suspect the patriots, I put the Company entirely aside, as having forfeited all claim to confidence in such a business,

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and see no remedy, of course, but in the annihilation, if that could be accomplished, of the very existence of our authority in the East Indies.

The late Doctor Jortin*
Had the good fortune
To write these verses
Upon tombs and hearses;
Which I, being jinglish,
Have done into English.

IN BREVITATEM VITÆ SPATII, HOMINIBUS CONCESSI.

Hei mihi! Lege ratâ sol occidit atque resurgit,
Lunaque mutatæ reparat dispendia formæ,
Astraque, purpurei telis extincta diei,
Rursus nocte vigent. Humiles telluris alumni,
Graminis herba virens, et florum picta propago,
Quos crudelis hyems lethali tabe peredit,
Cum zephyri vox blanda vocat, rediitque sereni
Temperies anni, fœcundo é cespite surgunt.
Nos domini rerum, nos, magna et pulchra minati,
Cum breve ver vitæ robustaque transiit ætas,
Deficimus; nec nos ordo revolubilis auras
Reddit in ætherias, tumuli neque claustra resolvit.

ON THE SHORTNESS OF HUMAN LIFE.

Suns that set and moons that wane,
Rise and are restored again;
Stars that orient day subdues,
Night at her return renews;
Herbs and flowers, the beauteous birth
Of the genial womb of Earth,
Suffer but a transient death
From the winter's cruel breath.
Zephyr speaks, serener skies
Warm the glebe, and they arise
We, alas! Earth's haughty kings,
We that promise mighty things,
Losing soon life's happy prime,
Droop and fade in little time.
Spring returns, but not our bloom,
Still 'tis winter in the tomb.

Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

* Dr Jortin, the well known author of the *Life of Erasmus*, was born in London, 1698, died 1770. The thoughts in the verses, which Cowper has so beautifully rendered, are borrowed from Claudian.

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145. — TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MR NEWTON'S APOLOGIA — MOTTO AND TITLE FOR THE WORK — REFUSAL TO WRITE FOR A REVIEW.

February, 1784.

My dear Friend, — I am glad that you have finished a work, of which I well remember the beginning, and which I was sorry you thought it expedient to discontinue.* Your reason for not proceeding was, however, such as I was obliged to acquiesce in, being suggested by a jealousy you felt, "lest your spirit should be betrayed into acrimony, in writing upon such a subject." I doubt not you have sufficiently guarded that point, and indeed, at the time, I could not discover that you had failed in it. I have busied myself this morning in contriving a Greek title, and in seeking a motto. The motto you mention is certainly apposite. But I think it an objection, that it has been so much in use; almost every writer that has claimed a liberty to think for himself upon whatever subject, having chosen it. I therefore send you one, which I never saw in that shape yet, and which appears to me equally apt and proper. The Greek word δεσμος, which signifies literally, a shackle, may figuratively serve to express those chains which bigotry and prejudice cast upon the mind. It seems, therefore, to speak like a lawyer, no misnomer of your book, to call it,

Μισοδεσμος.†

The following pleases me most of all the mottos I have thought of. But with respect both to that and the title you will use your pleasure.

Querelis
Haud justis assurgis, et irrita jurgia jactas.‡

From the little I have seen, and the much I have heard of the manager of the Review you mention, I cannot feel even the smallest push of a desire to serve him in the capacity of a poet. Indeed, I dislike him so much, that, had I a drawer

* An Ecclesiastical History.
† Hating bonds.
‡ Your quarrels and complaints are now too late.
Dryden's *Æn.* X. 146.

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full of pieces fit for his purpose, I hardly think I should contribute to his collection. It is possible, too, that I may live to be once more a publisher myself; in which case, I should be glad to find myself in possession of any such original pieces, as might decently make their appearance in a volume of my own. At present, however, I have nothing that would be of use to him, nor have I many opportunities of composing, Sunday being the only day in the week which we spend alone.

I am at this moment pinched for time, but was desirous of proving to you, with what alacrity my Greek and Latin memory are always ready to obey you, and therefore, by the first post have, to the best of my ability, complied with your request.—Believe me, my dear friend, affectionately yours,

W. C.

146.—TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

TIME FOR STUDY — NERVOUS MEN — VISION OF ADAM.

February 10, 1784.

My dear Friend,—The morning is my writing time, and in the morning I have no spirits. So much the worse for my correspondents. Sleep, that refreshes my body, seems to cripple me in every other respect. As the evening approaches, I grow more alert, and when I am retiring to bed, am more fit for mental occupation, than at any other time. So it fares with us whom they call nervous. By a strange inversion of the animal economy, we are ready to sleep when we have most need to be awake, and go to bed just when we might sit up to some purpose. The watch is irregularly wound up, it goes in the night when it is not wanted, and in the day stands still. In many respects we have the advantage of our forefathers the Picts.* We sleep in a whole skin, and are not obliged to submit to the painful operation of punctuating ourselves from head to foot, in order that we may be decently

* It is not easy to discover upon what principle the Picts are selected throughout this letter as the ancestors of the English. Of the eighteen tribes, or nations, inhabiting England under the Romans, all were Celts, or Belgæ. The Picts, or Pechts, or Peochts, or however it may please antiquaries to spell the word, were of Scythian origin, and possessed the northern parts of Britain only. Probably Cowper used the name in a loose way, rather from classical than historical associations.

Barbara de *Pictis* veni bascauda Britannis. — Martial.

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dressed, and fit to appear abroad. But, on the other hand, we have reason enough to envy them their tone of nerves, and that flow of spirits which effectually secured them from all uncomfortable impressions of a gloomy atmosphere, and from every shade of melancholy from every other cause. They understood, I suppose, the use of vulnerary herbs, having frequent occasion for some skill in surgery; but physicians, I presume, they had none, having no need of any. Is it possible, that a creature like myself can be descended from such progenitors, in whom there appears not a single trace of family resemblance? What an alteration have a few ages made! They, without clothing, would defy the severest season; and I, with all the accommodations that art has since invented, am hardly secure even in the mildest. If the wind blows upon me when my pores are open, I catch cold. A cough is the consequence. I suppose if such a disorder could have seized a Pict, his friends would have concluded that a bone had stuck in his throat, and that he was in some danger of choking. They would perhaps have addressed themselves to the cure of his cough, by thrusting their fingers into his gullet, which would only have exasperated the case. But they would never have thought of administering laudanum, my only remedy. For this difference, however, that has obtained between me and my ancestors, I am indebted to the luxurious practices, and enfeebling self-indulgence, of a long line of grandsires, who from generation to generation have been employed in deteriorating the breed, till at last the collected effects of all their follies have centred in my puny self,—a man indeed, but not in the image of those that went before me—a man, who sigh and groan, who wear out life in dejection and oppression of spirits, and who never think of the aborigines of the country to which I belong, without wishing that I had been born among them. The evil is without a remedy, unless the ages that are passed could be recalled, my whole pedigree be permitted to live again, and being properly admonished to beware of enervating sloth and refinement, would preserve their hardiness of nature unimpaired, and transmit the desirable quality to their posterity. I once saw Adam in a dream. We sometimes say of a picture, that we doubt not its likeness to the original, though we never saw him,—a judgment we have some reason to form, when the face is strongly charactered, and the features full of expression. So I think of my visionary Adam, and for a similar reason. His figure was awkward,

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indeed, in the extreme. It was evident that he had never been taught by a Frenchman to hold his head erect, or to turn out his toes; to dispose gracefully of his arms, or to simper without a meaning. But if Mr Bacon* was called upon to produce a statue of Hercules, he need not wish for a juster pattern. He stood like a rock; the size of his limbs, the prominence of his muscles, and the height of his stature, all conspired to bespeak him a creature whose strength had suffered no diminution; and who, being the first of his race, did not come into the world under a necessity of sustaining a load of infirmities, derived to him from the intemperance of others. He was as much stouter than a Pict, as I suppose a Pict to have been than I. Upon my hypothesis therefore, there has been a gradual declension, in point of bodily vigour, from Adam down to me: at least if my dream were a just representation of that gentleman, and deserve the credit I cannot help giving it, such must have been the case.—Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

147.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL.

PROGRESS OF THE TASK.

February 22, 1784.

I CONGRATULATE you on the thaw—I suppose it is an universal blessing, and probably felt all over Europe. I

* John Bacon, the first British artist who, by native talent and with native education only, attained to eminence in sculpture. Though descended, it is said, from an ancient and wealthy family of Somersetshire, he was born the son of a cloth worker, and under the pressure of poverty and ill health, in the borough of Southwark, on the 24th of November, 1740. Bacon commenced his career, as modeller and colourist, in a porcelain manufactory, and, never having travelled, he heard the first regular instructions on his art, in his twenty-eighth year, when the Royal Academy was instituted. He surmounted all difficulties by industry and study of nature, and, though his compositions are deficient in sentiment and ideal beauty, there is often in his monumental figures, especially of those eminent men whom he had personally known, a truth and individuality which place, for instances, the statues of Johnson, Howard, and Chatham, among the most effective productions of English art. Bacon was a good man and a Christian, qualities which chiefly recommended him to the author of these letters. He died in London on the 4th of August, 1799, and lies interred in the chapel, Tottenham Court Road, under a marble tablet, with the following inscription, written by himself:—

"What I was, as an artist, seemed of some importance to me while I lived; but what I really was, as a believer in Christ Jesus, is the only thing of importance to me now."

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myself am the better for it, who wanted nothing that might make the frost supportable; what reason, therefore, have they to rejoice, who, being in want of all things, were exposed to its utmost rigour? The ice in my ink, however, is not yet dissolved. It was long before the frost seized it, but at last it prevailed. The Sofa has consequently received little or no addition since. It consists at present of four books, and part of a fifth; when the sixth is finished, the work is accomplished, but if I may judge by my present inability, that period is at a considerable distance.

148.—TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MR THORNTON'S LIBERALITY — PARLIAMENTARY REPORTS — FOX AND NORTH — THEOLOGICAL MISCELLANY.

February, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I give you joy of a thaw, that has put an end to a frost of nine weeks' continuance, with very little interruption; the longest that has happened since the year 1739. May I presume that you feel yourself indebted to me for intelligence, which perhaps no other of your correspondents will vouchsafe to communicate, though they are as well apprized of it, and as much convinced of the truth of it as myself? It is, I suppose, everywhere felt as a blessing, but nowhere more sensibly than at Olney; though even at Olney the severity of it has been alleviated in behalf of many. The same benefactor who befriended them last year, has with equal liberality administered a supply to their necessities in the present. Like the subterraneous flue that warms my myrtles, he does good and is unseen. His injunctions of secrecy are still as rigorous as ever, and must therefore be observed with the same attention. He, however, is a happy man, whose philanthropy is not like mine, an impotent principle, spending itself in fruitless wishes. At the same time, I confess it is a consolation, and I feel it an honour, to be employed as the conductor, and to be trusted as the dispenser of another man's bounty. Some have been saved from perishing, and all that could partake of it, from the most pitiable distress.

I will not apologize for my politics, or suspect them of error, merely because they are taken up from the newspapers. I take it for granted, that those reporters of the wisdom of our representatives are tolerably correct and faithful. Were

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they not, and were they guilty of frequent and gross misrepresentation, assuredly they would be chastised by the rod of parliamentary criticism. Could I be present at the debates, I should indeed have a better opinion of my documents. But if the House of Commons be the best school of British politics, which I think an undeniable assertion, then he that reads what passes there has opportunities of information, inferior only to theirs who hear for themselves, and can be present upon the spot. Thus qualified I take courage; and when a certain reverend neighbour of ours curls his nose at me, and holds my opinions cheap, merely because he has passed through London, I am not altogether convinced that he has reason on his side. I do not know that the air of the metropolis has a power to brighten the intellects, or that to sleep a night in the great city is a necessary cause of wisdom. He tells me that Mr Fox* is a rascal, and that Lord North† is a villain, that every creature execrates them both, and that I ought to do so too. But I beg to be excused. Villain and rascal are appellations, which we, who do not converse with great men, are rather sparing in the use of. I can conceive them both to be most entirely persuaded of the rectitude of their conduct; and the rather, because I feel myself much inclined to believe that, being so, they are not mistaken. I cannot think that secret influence is a bugbear, a phantom conjured up to serve a purpose, the mere shibboleth of a party: and being, and having always been, somewhat of an enthusiast on the subject of British liberty, I am not able to withhold my reverence and good wishes from the man, whoever he be, that exerts himself in a constitutional way to oppose it.

* Charles James Fox, second son of Lord Holland, was born January 13, 1748, and died on the 16th September, 1806. The events in the life of this splendid orator and great politician—for great statesman or great minister he cannot be called—may be classed as follows, from his entering parliament at the age of nineteen, to the rupture with Lord North in 1774. From that period, to the famous coalition and expulsion of the united parties on the India bill, 1783-4, the last twenty years of Fox's life were passed in active opposition to Pitt. In reference to the text, and Cowper's opinions generally on the subject, it is not unworthy of remark, that Fox commenced his political career as a partisan of the ministry, forsook that interest only when it expelled him, and was a patriot and reformer solely when in opposition.

† Frederic North, Earl of Guildford, born 1732, became Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1767; First Lord of the Treasury, 1770; retained office throughout the American war; resigned in 1782, and returned to office with the Coalition, for a few months, in 1783. He then retired from public life, and died blind in 1792.

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Caraccioli upon the subject of self-acquaintance was never, I believe, translated. I have sometimes thought that the Theological Miscellany might be glad of a chapter of it monthly. It is a work which I much admire. You, who are master of their plan, can tell me whether such a contribution would be welcome. If you think it would, I would be punctual in my remittances; and a labour of that sort would suit me better in my present state of mind than original composition on religious subjects.

Remember us as those that love you, and are never unmindful of you.—Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

149.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

LORD PETRE—MR THORNTON'S CHARITIES—COWPER'S DISLIKE TO NEW CORRESPONDENTS.

February 29, 1784.

My dear Friend,—We are glad that you have such a Lord Petre in your neighbourhood. He must be a man of a liberal turn, to employ a heretic in such a service. I wish you a farther acquaintance with him, not doubting that the more he knows you he will find you the more agreeable. You despair of becoming a prebendary for want of certain rhythmical talents, which you suppose me possessed of. But what think you of a cardinal's hat? Perhaps his lordship may have interest at Rome, and that greater honour may await you. Seriously, however, I respect his character, and should not be sorry if there were many such Papists in the land.

Mr——— has given free scope to his generosity, and contributed as largely to the relief of Olney as he did last year. Soon after I had given you notice of his first remittance, we received a second to the same amount, accompanied indeed with an intimation that we were to consider it as an anticipated supply, which, but for the uncommon severity of the present winter, he should have reserved for the next. The inference is, that next winter we are to expect nothing. But the man and his beneficent turn of mind considered, there is some reason to hope that, logical as the inference seems, it may yet be disappointed.

Adverting to your letter again, I perceive that you wish for my opinion of your answer to his lordship. Had I forgot to tell you that I approve of it, I know you well enough to be aware of the misinterpretation you would have put upon my

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silence. I am glad, therefore, that I happened to cast my eye upon your appeal to my opinion, before it was too late. A modest man, however able, has always some reason to distrust himself upon extraordinary occasions. Nothing so apt to betray us into absurdity as too great a dread of it; and the application of more strength than enough is sometimes as fatal as too little: but you have escaped very well. For my own part, when I write to a stranger, I feel myself deprived of half my intellects. I suspect that I shall write nonsense, and I do so. I tremble at the thought of an inaccuracy, and become absolutely ungrammatical. I feel myself sweat. I have recourse to the knife and the pounce. I correct half a dozen blunders, which in a common case I should not have committed, and have no sooner despatched what I have written, than I recollect how much better I could have made it; how easily and genteely I could have relaxed the stiffness of the phrase, and have cured the insufferable awkwardness of the whole, had they struck me a little earlier. Thus we stand in awe of we know not what, and miscarry through mere desire to excel.

I read Johnson's Prefaces every night, except when the newspaper calls me off. At a time like the present, what author can stand in competition with a newspaper? or who, that has a spark of patriotism, does not point all his attention to the present crisis? W. C.

I am so disgusted with ——— for allowing himself to be silent, when so loudly called upon to write to you, that I do not choose to express my feelings. Wo to the man whom kindness cannot soften!

150. — TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

WORKS OF CARACCIOLI — DECLINES TO TRANSLATE A PORTION OF THEM — DANGER OF ATTRIBUTING RELIGIOUS COMFORT TO ANY SOURCE SAVE FAITH IN CHRIST.

March 8, 1784.

My dear Friend, — I thank you for the two first numbers of the Theological Miscellany. I have not read them regularly through, but sufficiently to observe that they are much indebted to Omicron. An essay, signed Parvulus, pleased me likewise; and I shall be glad if a neighbour of ours, to whom I have lent them, should be able to apply to his own use the lesson it

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inculcates. On farther consideration, I have seen reason to forego my purpose of translating Caraccioli. Though I think no book more calculated to teach the art of pious meditation, or to enforce a conviction of the vanity of all pursuits that have not the soul's interests for their object, I can yet see a flaw in his manner of instructing, that, in a country so enlightened as ours, would escape nobody's notice. Not enjoying the advantages of evangelical ordinances, and Christian communion, he falls into a mistake natural in his situation; ascribing always the pleasures he found in a holy life to his own industrious perseverance in a contemplative course, and not to the immediate agency of the great Comforter of his people; and directing the eye of his readers to a spiritual principle within, which he supposes to subsist in the soul of every man, as the source of all divine enjoyment, and not to Christ, as he would gladly have done, had he fallen under Christian teachers. Allowing for these defects, he is a charming writer, and by those who know how to make such allowances, may be read with great delight and improvement. But with these defects in his manner, though, I believe, no man ever had a heart more devoted to God, he does not seem dressed with sufficient exactness to be fit for the public eye, where man is known to be nothing, and Jesus all in all. He must, therefore, be dismissed as an unsuccessful candidate for a place in this Miscellany, and will be less mortified at being rejected in the first instance, than if he had met with a refusal from the publisher. I can only therefore repeat what I said before, that when I find a proper subject, and myself at liberty to pursue it, I will endeavour to contribute my quota.

W. C.

151.—TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

PUBLICATION OF HIS APOLOGY—ADVANTAGE OF TEMPER IN A CONTROVERSY.

OLNEY, *March* 11, 1784.

I RETURN you many thanks for your Apology, which I have read with great pleasure.* You know of old that your style always pleases me: and having in a former letter given you the reasons for which I like it, I spare you now the pain of a repetition. The spirit, too, in which you write, pleases me as much. But I perceive that in some cases it is possible to be

* The book alluded to, is entitled *Apologia; Four Letters to a Minister of an Independent Church. By a Minister of the Church of England.*

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severe, and at the same time perfectly good tempered; in all cases, I suppose, where we suffer by an injurious and unreasonable attack, and can justify our conduct by a plain and simple narrative. On such occasions, truth itself seems a satire, because, by implication at least, it convicts our adversaries of the want of charity and candour. For this reason, perhaps you will find that you have made many angry, though you are not so; and it is possible they may be the more angry upon that very account. To assert, and to prove, that an enlightened minister of the Gospel may, without any violation of his conscience, and even upon the ground of prudence and propriety, continue in the establishment; and to do this with the most absolute composure, must be very provoking to the dignity of some dissenting doctors: and to nettle them still the more, you in a manner impose upon them the necessity of being silent, by declaring that you will be so yourself. Upon the whole, however, I have no doubt that your Apology will do good. If it should irritate some, who have more zeal than knowledge, and more of bigotry than of either, it may serve to enlarge the views of others, and to convince them that there may be grace, truth, and efficacy, in the ministry of a church of which they are not members. I wish it success, and all that attention to which, both from the nature of the subject, and the manner in which you have treated it, it is so well entitled.

The patronage of the East Indies will be a dangerous weapon in whatever hands. I have no prospect of deliverance for this country, but the same that I have of a possibility that we may one day be disencumbered of our ruinous possessions in the East.

Our good neighbours, who have so successfully knocked away our Western crutch from under us, seem to design us the same favour on the opposite side; in which case we shall be poor, but I think we shall stand a better chance to be free: and I had rather drink water gruel for breakfast, and be no man's slave, than wear a chain, and drink tea as usual.

I have just room to add, that we love you as usual, and are your very affectionate William and Mary.

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152. — TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

DIFFICULTY OF FRENCH TRANSLATION — PIOUS MELANCHOLY OF RELIGIOUS WRITERS IN THAT LANGUAGE.

March 19, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I wish it were in my power to give you any account of the Marquis Caraccioli. Some years since, I saw a short history of him in the Review, of which I recollect no particulars, except that he was (and for aught I know may be still) an officer in the Prussian service. I have two volumes of his works, lent me by Lady Austen. One is upon the subject of self-acquaintance, and the other treats of the art of conversing with the same gentleman. Had I pursued my purpose of translating him, my design was to have furnished myself, if possible, with some authentic account of him, which I suppose may be procured at any bookseller's who deals in foreign publications. But for the reasons given in my last, I have laid aside the design. There is something in his style that touches me exceedingly, and which I do not know how to describe. I should call it pathetic, if it were occasionally only, and never occurred but when his subject happened to be particularly affecting. But it is universal; he has not a sentence that is not marked with it. Perhaps, therefore, I may describe it better by saying, that his whole work has an air of pious and tender melancholy, which, to me at least, is extremely agreeable. This property of it, which depends perhaps altogether upon the arrangement of his words, and the modulation of his sentences, it would be very difficult to preserve in a translation. I do not know that our language is capable of being so managed, and rather suspect that it is not, and that it is peculiar to the French, because it is not unfrequent among their writers, and I never saw any thing similar to it in our own.

My evenings are devoted to books. I read aloud for the entertainment of the party, thus making amends by a vociferation of two hours for my silence at other times. We are in good health, and waiting as patiently as we can for the end of this second winter.— Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

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153. — TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

THE POET'S RETIREMENT — VISIT FROM A PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATE.

March 29, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — It being his majesty's pleasure that I should yet have another opportunity to write before he dissolves the parliament, I avail myself of it with all possible alacrity. I thank you for your last, which was not the less welcome for coming, like an extraordinary gazette, at a time when it was not expected.

As, when the sea is uncommonly agitated, the water finds its way into creeks and holes of rocks, which in its calmer state it never reaches; in like manner, the effect of these turbulent times is felt even at Orchardside, where in general we live as undisturbed by the political element, as shrimps or cockles that have been accidentally deposited in some hollow beyond the water mark, by the usual dashing of the waves. We were sitting yesterday after dinner, the two ladies and myself, very composedly, and without the least apprehension of any such intrusion, in our snug parlour, one lady knitting, the other netting, and the gentleman winding worsted, when, to our unspeakable surprise, a mob appeared before the window, a smart rap was heard at the door, the boys hallooed, and the maid announced Mr G——. Puss * was unfortunately let out of her box, so that the candidate, with all his good friends at his heels, was refused admittance at the grand entry, and referred to the back door, as the only possible way of approach.

Candidates are creatures not very susceptible of affronts, and would rather, I suppose, climb in at a window, than be absolutely excluded. In a minute, the yard, the kitchen, and the parlour, were filled. Mr G——, advancing toward me, shook me by the hand with a degree of cordiality that was extremely seducing. As soon as he and as many more as could find chairs were seated, he began to open the intent of his visit. I told him I had no vote, for which he readily gave me credit. I assured him I had no influence, which he was not equally inclined to believe, and the less, no doubt, because Mr A——, addressing himself to me at that moment, informed me that I had a great deal. Supposing that I could

* His tame hare.

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not be possessed of such a treasure without knowing it, I ventured to confirm my first assertion, by saying, that if I had any I was utterly at a loss to imagine where it could be, or wherein it consisted. Thus ended the conference. Mr G—— squeezed me by the hand again, kissed the ladies, and withdrew. He kissed likewise the maid in the kitchen, and seemed upon the whole a most loving, kissing, kind-hearted gentleman. He is very young, genteel, and handsome. He has a pair of very good eyes in his head, which not being sufficient, as it should seem, for the many nice and difficult purposes of a senator, he has a third also, which he wore suspended by a riband from his button-hole. The boys hallooed, the dogs barked, Puss scampered, the hero, with his long train of obsequious followers, withdrew. We made ourselves very merry with the adventure, and in a short time settled into our former tranquillity, never probably to be thus interrupted more. I thought myself, however, happy in being able to affirm truly that I had not that influence for which he sued; and for which, had I been possessed of it, with my present views of the dispute between the Crown and the Commons, I must have refused him, for he is on the side of the former. It is comfortable to be of no consequence in a world where one cannot exercise any without disobliging somebody. The town, however, seems to be much at his service, and if he be equally successful throughout the county, he will undoubtedly gain his election. Mr A—— perhaps was a little mortified, because it was evident that I owed the honour of this visit to his misrepresentation of my importance. But had he thought proper to assure Mr G—— that I had three heads, I should not, I suppose, have been bound to produce them.

Mr S——, who you say was so much admired in your pulpit, would be equally admired in his own, at least by all capable judges, were he not so apt to be angry with his congregation. This hurts him, and had he the understanding and eloquence of Paul himself, would still hurt him. He seldom, hardly ever indeed, preaches a gentle, well-tempered sermon, but I hear it highly commended: but warmth of temper, indulged to a degree that may be called scolding, defeats the end of preaching. It is a misapplication of his powers, which it also cripples, and teases away his hearers. But he is a good man, and may perhaps outgrow it.—Yours,

W. C.

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154. — TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

DANGER OF TRIFLING WITH OUR MAKER — EARTHQUAKE IN ITALY.

April, 1784.

People that are but little acquainted with the terrors of divine wrath, are not much afraid of trifling with their Maker. But for my own part I would sooner take Empedocles's leap, and fling myself into Mount Ætna, than I would do it in the slightest instance, were I in circumstances to make an election. In the Scripture we find a broad and clear exhibition of mercy; it is displayed in every page. Wrath is in comparison but slightly touched upon, because it is not so much a discovery of wrath as of forgiveness. And had the displeasure of God been the principal subject of the book, and had it circumstantially set forth that measure of it only which may be endured even in this life, the Christian world perhaps would have been less comfortable; but I believe presumptuous meddlers with the Gospel would have been less frequently met with. — The word is a flaming sword; and he that touches it with unhallowed fingers, thinking to make a tool of it, will find that he has burnt them.

What havoc in Calabria! every house is built upon the sand, whose inhabitants have no God, or only a false one. Solid and fluid are such in respect to each other; but with reference to the Divine power they are equally fixed or equally unstable. The inhabitants of a rock shall sink, while a cockboat shall save a man alive in the midst of the fathomless ocean. The Pope grants dispensations for folly and madness during the carnival; but it seems they are as offensive to Him, whose vicegerent he pretends himself, at that season as at any other. Were I a Calabrian, I would not give my papa at Rome one farthing for his amplest indulgence, for this time forth for ever. There is a word that makes this world tremble, and the Pope cannot countermand it. A fig for such a conjurer! Pharaoh's conjurers had twice his ability. — Believe me, my dear friend, affectionately yours, W. C.

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155. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

CHARACTERS OF BEATTIE AND BLAIR — ORIGIN OF LANGUAGES.

April 5, 1784.

My dear William, — I thanked you in my last for Johnson: I now thank you, with more emphasis, for Beattie, the most agreeable and amiable writer I ever met with; the only author I have seen whose critical and philosophical researches are diversified and embellished by a poetical imagination, that makes even the driest subject, and the leanest, a feast for an epicure in books. He is so much at his ease, too, that his own character appears in every page; and, which is very rare, we see not only the writer, but the man; and that man so gentle, so well tempered, so happy in his religion, and so humane in his philosophy, that it is necessary to love him, if one has any sense of what is lovely. If you have not his poem called the *Minstrel*, and cannot borrow it, I must beg you to buy it for me; for though I cannot afford to deal largely in so expensive a commodity as books, I must afford to purchase at least the poetical works of Beattie. * I have read six of Blair's Lectures, and what do I say of Blair? † That he is a sensible man, master of his subject, and, excepting here and there a Scotticism, a good writer, so far at least as perspicuity of expression and method contribute to make one. But oh, the sterility of that man's fancy! if indeed he has any such faculty belonging to him. Perhaps philosophers, or men designed for such, are sometimes born without one; or

* James Beattie, LL. D. born 1735, near Laurencekirk, in Kincardineshire, was elected Professor of Moral Philosophy in Marischal College, Aberdeen, 1760, where he died in 1803. His works consist of *Juvenile Poems*, *Essay on Truth*, *Dissertations*, *Elements of Moral Science*, *Evidences of Christianity*, *Letters*, *&c.* and the *Minstrel*, upon which his fame with posterity must mainly rest. The high character given in the text, by one whose genius so closely resembled his own, while it will tend to sustain the opinion long entertained of his works, is very gratifying to the Editor, who has the honour of claiming a near relationship with Dr Beattie.

† Hugh Blair, D.D. was born at Edinburgh, 1718, and died there, Minister of the High Church and Professor of Rhetoric, in 1800. Nothing can be juster than the character given of Blair, in this and the succeeding letters, who, as a divine, is a cold, correct composer of moral essays, and, in literature, a systematic normalist, incapable alike of snatching or enjoying

A grace beyond the reach of art.

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perhaps it withers for want of exercise. However that may be, Doctor Blair has such a brain as Shakespeare somewhere describes, — "dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage."

I take it for granted that these good men are philosophically correct (for they are both agreed upon the subject) in their account of the origin of language; and if the Scripture had left us in the dark upon that article, I should very readily adopt their hypothesis for want of better information. I should suppose, for instance, that man made his first effort in speech in the way of an interjection, and that ah, or oh being uttered with wonderful gesticulation, and variety of attitude, must have left his powers of expression quite exhausted: that in a course of time he would invent names for many things, but first for the objects of his daily wants. An apple would consequently be called an apple, and perhaps not many years would elapse before the appellation would receive the sanction of general use. In this case, and upon this supposition, seeing one in the hand of another man, he would exclaim, with a most moving pathos, "O apple!" Well and good — O apple! is a very affecting speech, but in the meantime it profits him nothing. The man that holds it, eats it, and *he* goes away with O apple! in his mouth, and with nothing better. Reflecting on his disappointment, and that perhaps it arose from his not being more explicit, he contrives a term to denote his idea of transfer or gratuitous communication, and the next occasion that offers of a similar kind, performs his part accordingly. His speech now stands thus, "Oh give apple!" The apple-holder perceives himself called upon to part with his fruit, and having satisfied his own hunger, is perhaps not unwilling to do so. But unfortunately there is still room for a mistake, and a third person being present, he gives the apple to *him*. Again disappointed, and again perceiving that his language has not all the precision that is requisite, the orator retires to his study, and there, after much deep thinking, conceives that the insertion of a pronoun, whose office shall be to signify that he not only wants the apple to be given, but given to himself, will remedy all defects, he uses it the next opportunity, and succeeds to a wonder, obtains the apple, and by his success such credit to his invention, that pronouns continue to be in great repute ever after.

Now, as my two syllable mongers, Beattie and Blair, both a ree that language was originally inspired, and that the great variety of languages we find upon earth at present took its rise from the confusion of tongues at Babel, I am

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not perfectly convinced that there is any just occasion to invent this very ingenious solution of a difficulty, which Scripture has solved already. My opinion, however, is, if I may presume to have an opinion of my own so different from theirs who are so much wiser than myself, that if man had been his own teacher, and had acquired his words and his phrases only as necessity or convenience had prompted, his progress must have been considerably slower than it was, and in Homer's days, the production of such a poem as the Iliad impossible. On the contrary, I doubt not Adam, on the very day of his creation, was able to express himself in terms both forcible and elegant, and that he was at no loss for sublime diction, and logical combination, when he wanted to praise his Maker.—Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

156.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED—ORDINARY APPEARANCES OF NATURE IN POETICAL DESCRIPTION.

April 25, 1784.

My dear William,—I wish I had both burning words and bright thoughts. But I have at present neither. My head is not itself. Having had an unpleasant night, and a melancholy day, and having already written a long letter, I do not find myself, in point of spirits, at all qualified either to burn or shine. The post sets out early on Tuesday. The morning is the only time of exercise with me. In order, therefore, to keep it open for that purpose, and to comply with your desire of an immediate answer, I give you as much as I can spare of the present evening.

Since I despatched my last, Blair has crept a little farther into my favour. As his subjects improve, he improves with them; but, upon the whole, I account him a dry writer; useful, no doubt, as an instructor, but as little entertaining as with so much knowledge it is possible to be. His language is (except Swift's) the least figurative I remember to have seen, and the few figures found in it, are not aways happily employed. I take him to be a critic very little animated by what he reads, who rather reasons about the beauties of an author, than really tastes them; and who finds that a passage is praiseworthy, not because it charms him, but because it is accommodated to the laws of criticism in that case made and provided. I have a little complied with your desire of

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marginal annotations, and should have dealt in them more largely, had I read the books to myself; but being reader to the ladies, I have not always time to settle my own opinion of a doubtful expression, much less to suggest an emendation. I have not censured a particular observation in the book, though, when I met with it, it displeased me. I this moment recollect it, and may as well, therefore, note it here. He is commending, and deservedly, that most noble description of a thunderstorm in the first Georgic, which ends with

Ingeminant austri et densissimus imber. *

Being in haste, I do not refer to the volume for his very words, but my memory will serve me with the matter. When poets describe, he says, they should always select such circumstances of the subject as are least obvious, and therefore most striking. He therefore admires the effects of the thunderbolt splitting mountains, and filling a nation with astonishment, but quarrels with the closing member of the period, as containing particulars of a storm not worthy of Virgil's notice, because obvious to the notice of all. But here I differ from him; not being able to conceive that wind and rain can be improper in the description of a tempest, or how wind and rain could possibly be more poetically described. Virgil is indeed remarkable for finishing his periods well, and never comes to a stop but with the most consummate dignity of numbers and expression; and in the instance in question I think his skill in this respect is remarkably displayed. The line is perfectly majestic in its march. As to the wind, it is such only as the word *ingeminant* could describe, and the words *densissimus imber* give one an idea of a shower indeed, but of such a shower as is not very common, and such a one as only Virgil could have done justice to by a single epithet. Far, therefore, from agreeing with the Doctor in his stricture, I do not think the Æneid contains a nobler line, or a description more magnificently finished.

We are glad that Dr C—— has singled you out upon this occasion. Your performance, we doubt not, will justify his

* The winds redouble, with the densest rain.

The remarks here are excellent, both as respects the particular line and the general character of Virgilian description. They are worthy of the same close observer of Nature, who, in the *Task*, has, by a single epithet, presented the same idea in one of the most faithful and picturesque of images,

—— The slanting shower.

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choice: fear not—you have a heart that can feel upon charitable occasions, and therefore will not fail you upon this. The burning words will come fast enough, when the sensibility is such as yours.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

157.—TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

CONTINUATION OF THE SAME SUBJECT—CRITICISM THE OFFSPRING OF WRITING, NOT WRITING PRODUCED BY CRITICISM.

April 26, 1784.

We are glad that your book runs. It will not, indeed, satisfy those whom nothing could satisfy but your accession to their party; but the liberal will say you do well, and it is in the opinion of such men only that you can feel yourself interested.

I have lately been employed in reading Beattie, and Blair's Lectures. The latter I have not yet finished. I find the former the most * agreeable of the two, indeed the most entertaining writer upon dry subjects that I ever met with. His imagination is highly poetical, his language easy and elegant, and his manner so familiar that we seem to be conversing with an old friend, upon terms of the most sociable intercourse, while we read him. Blair is, on the contrary, rather stiff; not that his style is pedantic, but his air is formal. He is a sensible man, and understands his subjects, but too conscious that he is addressing the public, and too solicitous about his success, to indulge himself for a moment in that play of fancy which makes the other so agreeable. In Blair we find a scholar, in Beattie both a scholar and an amiable man; indeed so amiable that I have wished for his acquaintance ever since I read his book. Having never in my life perused a page of Aristotle, I am glad to have had an opportunity of learning more than, I suppose, he would have taught me, from the writings of two modern critics. I felt myself, too, a little disposed to compliment my own acumen upon the occasion. For though the art of writing and composing was never much my study, I did not find that they had any great news to tell me. They have assisted me in putting my observations into some method, but have not suggested many, of which I was not by some means or other

* It ought to be *more*. It is rare to detect an error in Cowper's language; and therefore the necessity of marking the inaccuracy is the greater.

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previously apprised. In fact, critics did not originally beget authors; but authors made critics. Common sense dictated to writers the necessity of method, connection, and thoughts congruous to the nature of their subject; genius prompted them with embellishments; and then came the critics. Observing the good effects of an attention to these items, they enacted laws for the observance of them in time to come; and, having drawn their rules for good writing from what was actually well written, boasted themselves the inventors of an art which yet the authors of the day had already exemplified. They are, however, useful in their way, giving us at one view a map of the boundaries which propriety sets to fancy; and serving as judges to whom the public may at once appeal, when pestered with the vagaries of those who have had the hardiness to transgress them.

The candidates for this county have set an example of economy, which other candidates would do well to follow, having come to an agreement on both sides to defray the expenses of their voters, but to open no houses for the entertainment of the rabble; a reform, however, which the rabble did not at all approve of, and testified their dislike of it by a riot. A stage was built, from which the orators had designed to harangue the electors. This became the first victim of their fury. Having very little curiosity to hear what gentlemen could say, who would give them nothing better than words, they broke it in pieces, and threw the fragments upon the hustings. The sheriff, the members, the lawyers, the voters, were instantly put to flight. They rallied, but were again routed by a second assault, like the former. They then proceeded to break the windows of the inn to which they had fled; and a fear prevailing that at night they would fire the town, a proposal was made by the freeholders to face about and endeavour to secure them. At that instant a rioter, dressed in a Merry Andrew's jacket, stepped forward, and challenged the best man among them. Olney sent the hero to the field, who made him repent of his presumption. Mr A—— was he. Seizing him by the throat, he shook him—he threw him to the earth, he made the hollowness of his skull resound by the application of his fists, and dragged him into custody without the least damage to his person. Animated by this example, the other freeholders followed it: and in five minutes twenty-eight out of thirty ragamuffins were safely lodged in jail.—Adieu, my dear friend. We love you, and we yours,

W. & M.

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158.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

IMMODESTY AND PERNICIOUS EFFECTS OF PAINTING THE FACE.

May 3, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The subject of face painting may be considered, I think, in two points of view. First, there is room for dispute with respect to the consistency of the practice with good morals; and secondly, whether it be on the whole convenient or not, may be a matter worthy of agitation. I set out with all the formality of logical disquisition, but do not promise to observe the same regularity any farther than it may comport with my purpose of writing as fast as I can.

As to the immorality of the custom, were I in France, I should see none. On the contrary, it seems in that country to be a symptom of modest consciousness, and a tacit confession of what all know to be true, that French faces have in fact neither red nor white of their own. This humble acknowledgment of a defect looks the more like a virtue, being found among a people not remarkable for humility. Again, before we can prove the practice to be immoral, we must prove immorality in the design of those who use it; either that they intend a deception, or to kindle unlawful desires in the beholders. But the French ladies, so far as their purpose comes in question, must be acquitted of both these charges. Nobody supposes their colour to be natural for a moment, any more than if it were blue or green; and this unambiguous judgment of the matter is owing to two causes: first, to the universal knowledge we have, that French women are naturally brown or yellow, with very few exceptions; and secondly, to the inartificial manner in which they paint: for they do not, as I am most satisfactorily informed, even attempt an imitation of Nature, but besmear themselves hastily, and at a venture, anxious only to lay on enough. Where, therefore, there is no wanton intention, nor a wish to deceive, I can discover no immorality. But in England, I am afraid, our painted ladies are not clearly entitled to the same apology. They even imitate Nature with such exactness, that the whole public is sometimes divided into parties, who litigate with great warmth the question, whether painted or not? This was remarkably the case with a Miss B——, whom I well remember. Her roses and lilies were never discovered to be spurious, till she attained an age, that made the supposition of

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their being natural impossible. This anxiety to be not merely red and white, which is all they aim at in France, but to be thought very beautiful, and much more beautiful than Nature has made them, is a symptom not very favourable to the idea we would wish to entertain of the chastity, purity, and modesty of our countrywomen. That they are guilty of a design to deceive, is certain. Otherwise, why so much art? and if to deceive, wherefore, and with what purpose? Certainly, either to gratify vanity of the silliest kind, or, which is still more criminal, to decoy and inveigle, and carry on more successfully the business of temptation. Here, therefore, my opinion splits itself into two opposite sides upon the same question. I can suppose a French woman, though painted an inch deep, to be a virtuous, discreet, excellent character; and in no instance should I think the worse of one because she was painted. But an English belle must pardon me, if I have not the same charity for her. She is at least an impostor, whether she cheats me or not, because she means to do so; and it is well if that be all the censure she deserves.

This brings me to my second class of ideas upon this topic; and here I feel that I should be fearfully puzzled, were I called upon to recommend the practice on the score of convenience. If a husband choose that his wife should paint, perhaps it might be her duty, as well as her interest, to comply. But I think he would not much consult his own, for reasons that will follow. In the first place, she would admire herself the more; and in the next, if she managed the matter well, she might be more admired by others,—an acquisition that might bring her virtue under trials, to which, otherwise, it might never have been exposed. In no other case, however, can I imagine the practice in this country to be either expedient or convenient. As a general one, it certainly is not expedient, because, in general, English women have no occasion for it. A swarthy complexion is a rarity here; and the sex, especially since inoculation has been so much in use, have very little cause to complain that Nature has not been kind to them in the article of complexion. They may hide and spoil a good one, but they cannot — at least they hardly can — give themselves a better. But even if they could, there is yet a tragedy in the sequel, which should make them tremble. I understand that in France, though the use of rouge be general, the use of white paint is far from being so. In England, she that uses one commonly uses both. Now

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all white paints or lotions, or whatever they be called, are mercurial, consequently poisonous, consequently ruinous in time to the constitution. The Miss B—— above mentioned was a miserable witness of this truth, it being certain that her flesh fell from her bones before she died. Lady C—— was hardly a less melancholy proof of it; and a London physician perhaps, were he at liberty to blab, could publish a bill of female mortality, of a length that would astonish us.

For these reasons, I utterly condemn the practice, as it obtains in England: and for a reason superior to all these, I must disapprove it. I cannot indeed discover that Scripture forbids it in so many words. But that anxious solicitude about the person, which such an artifice evidently betrays, is, I am sure, contrary to the tenor and spirit of it throughout. Shew me a woman with a painted face, and I will shew you a woman whose heart is set on things of the earth, and not on things above. But this observation of mine applies to it only when it is an imitative art. For in the use of French women, I think it as innocent as in the use of the wild Indian, who draws a circle round her face, and makes two spots, perhaps blue, perhaps white, in the middle of it. Such are my thoughts upon the matter. *Vive valeque.*—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

159.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

DECLINES ATTEMPTING A SEQUEL TO JOHN GILPIN — SCRUPLES ABOUT ADMITTING THE POEM ITSELF INTO A COLLECTED EDITION OF HIS WORKS.

May 8, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—YOU do well to make your letters merry ones, though not very merry yourself, and that both for my sake and your own; for your own sake, because it sometimes happens, that by assuming an air of cheerfulness we become cheerful in reality; and for mine, because I have always more need of a laugh than a cry, being somewhat disposed to melancholy by natural temperament, as well as by other causes.

It was long since, and even in the infancy of John Gilpin, recommended to me by a lady now at Bristol, to write a sequel. But having always observed that authors, elated with the success of a first part, have fallen below themselves when they have attempted a second, I had more prudence than to take her counsel. I want you to read the history of that hero,

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published by Bladon, and to tell me what it is made of. But buy it not. For, puffed as it is in the papers, it can be but a bookseller's job, and must be dear at the price of two shillings. In the last packet but one that I received from Johnson, he asked me if I had any improvements of John Gilpin in hand, or if I designed any; for that to print only the original again would be to publish what has been hackneyed in every magazine, in every newspaper, and in every street. I answered, that the copy which I sent him contained two or three small variations from the first, except which I had none to propose, and if he thought him now too trite to make a part of my volume, I should willingly acquiesce in his judgment. I take it for granted therefore that he will not bring up the rear of my Poems according to my first intention, and shall not be sorry for the omission. It may spring from a principle of pride; but spring from what it may, I feel, and have long felt, a disinclination to a public avowal that he is mine; and since he became so popular, I have felt it more than ever; not that I should have expressed a scruple, if Johnson had not. But a fear has suggested itself to me, that I might expose myself to a charge of vanity by admitting him into my book, and that some people would impute it to me as a crime. Consider what the world is made of, and you will not find my suspicions chimerical. Add to this, that when, on correcting the latter part of the fifth book of the *Task*, I came to consider the solemnity and sacred nature of the subjects there handled, it seemed to me an incongruity at the least, not to call it by a harsher name, to follow up such premises with such a conclusion. I am well content therefore with having laughed, and made others laugh, and will build my hopes of success, as a poet, upon more important matter.

In our printing business we now jog on merrily enough. The coming week will, I hope, bring me to an end of the Task, and the next fortnight to an end of the whole. I am glad to have Paley on my side in the affair of education. He is certainly on all subjects a sensible man, and on such, a wise one. But I am mistaken, if Tirocinium do not make some of my friends angry, and procure me enemies not a few. There is a sting in verse, that prose neither has, nor can have; and I do not know that schools in the gross, and especially public schools, have ever been so pointedly condemned before. But they are become a nuisance, a pest, an abomination, and it is fit that the eyes and noses of mankind should, if possible, be opened to perceive it.

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works we generally lay by at that period of life when we are best qualified to read them, when, the judgment and the taste being formed, their beauties are least likely to be overlooked.

This change of wind and weather comforts me, and I should have enjoyed the first fine morning I have seen this month with a peculiar relish, if our new tax-maker had not put me out of temper. I am angry with him, not only for the matter, but for the manner of his proposal. When he lays his impost upon horses, he is jocular, and laughs, though, considering that wheels, and miles, and grooms, were taxed before, a graver countenance upon the occasion would have been more decent. But he provoked me still more by reasoning as he does on the justification of the tax upon candles. Some families, he says, will suffer little by it. Why? because they are so poor, that they cannot afford themselves more than ten pounds in the year. Excellent! they can use but few, therefore they will pay but little, and consequently will be but little burdened, an argument which for its cruelty and effrontery seems worthy of a hero; but he does not avail himself of the whole force of it, nor with all his wisdom had sagacity enough to see that it contains, when pushed to its utmost extent, a free discharge and acquittal of the poor from the payment of any tax at all; a commodity being once made too expensive for their pockets, will cost them nothing, for they will not buy it. Rejoice therefore, O ye pennyless! the minister will indeed send you to bed in the dark, but your remaining halfpenny will be safe; instead of being spent in the useless luxury of candlelight, it will buy you a roll for breakfast, which you will eat no doubt with gratitude to the man who so kindly lessens the number of your disbursements, and, while he seems to threaten your money, saves it. I wish he would remember that the halfpenny which government imposes, the shopkeeper will swell to twopence. I wish he would visit the miserable huts of our lace-makers at Olney, and see them working in the winter months, by the light of a farthing candle, from four in the afternoon till midnight: I wish he had laid his tax upon the ten thousand lamps that illuminate the Pantheon, upon the flambeaux that wait upon ten thousand chariots and sedans in an evening, and upon the wax candles that give light to ten thousand card tables. I wish, in short, that he would consider the pockets of the poor as sacred, and that to tax a people already so necessitous is but to discourage the little industry that is left among us, by driving the laborious to despair.

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A neighbour of mine, in Silver-end, keeps an ass; the ass lives on the other side of the garden-wall, and I am writing in the green-house: it happens that he is this morning most musically disposed, whether cheered by the fine weather, or by some new tune which he has just acquired, or by finding his voice more harmonious than usual. It would be cruel to mortify so fine a singer, therefore I do not tell him that he interrupts and hinders me, but I venture to tell you so, and to plead his performance in excuse of my abrupt conclusion.

I send you the goldfinches, with which you will do as you see good. We have an affectionate remembrance of your late visit, and of all our friends at Stock.—Believe me ever yours, W. C

163.—TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

PAGAN MYTHOLOGY NOT BELIEVED BY THE HEATHENS THEMSELVES—TAXES.

July 5, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—A dearth of materials, a consciousness that my subjects are for the most part, and must be uninteresting and unimportant, but above all, a poverty of animal spirits, that makes writing much a great fatigue to me, have occasioned my choice of smaller paper. Acquiesce in the justness of these reasons for the present, and if ever the times should mend with me, I sincerely promise to amend with them.

Homer says on a certain occasion, that Jupiter, when he was wanted at home, was gone to partake of an entertainment provided for him by the Æthiopians.* If, by Jupiter we

* The passage referred to is thus translated by Cowper himself:

> For, to the banks of the Oceanus,
> Where Æthiopia holds a feast to Jove,
> He journey'd yesterday, with whom the gods
> Went also, and the twelfth day brings them home.
> *Iliad*, I. 515.

Or, much better, by Pope,

> The sire of gods, and all th' etherial train,
> On the warm limits of the farthest main,
> Now mix with mortals, nor disdain to grace
> The feast of Ethiopia's blameless race.
> Twelve days the powers indulge the genial rite,
> Returning with the twelfth revolving light.

Homer here alludes to the extent of those regions stretching both north and south of the Equator, peopled by the Ethiopian races; consequently, Oceanus, in the version, and the note which Cowper has affixed to the passage, explaining it to be the Nile, are wrong.—See HEARN'S *Historical Researches*, vol. i.

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understand the weather, or the season, as the ancients frequently did, we may say, that our English Jupiter has been absent on account of some such invitation: during the whole month of June he left us to experience almost the rigours of winter. This fine day, however, affords us some hope that the feast is ended, and that we shall enjoy his company without the interference of his Æthiopian friends again.

Is it possible that the wise men of antiquity could entertain a real reverence for the fabulous rubbish, which they dignified with the name of religion? We, who have been favoured from our infancy with so clear a light, are perhaps hardly competent to decide the question, and may strive in vain to imagine the absurdities that even a good understanding may receive as truths, when totally unaided by revelation. It seems, however, that men, whose conceptions upon other subjects were often sublime, whose reasoning powers were undoubtedly equal to our own, and whose management in matters of jurisprudence that required a very industrious examination of evidence, was as acute and subtle as that of a modern attorney-general, could not be the dupes of such imposture as a child among us would detect and laugh at. Juvenal, I remember, introduces one of his Satires with an observation, that there were some in his day who had the hardiness to laugh at the stories of Tartarus, and Styx, and Charon, and of the frogs that croak upon the banks of Lethe, giving his reader at the same time cause to suspect that he was himself one of that profane number. Horace, on the other hand, declares in sober sadness, that he would not for all the world get into a boat with a man who had divulged the Eleusinian mysteries. Yet we know that those mysteries, whatever they might be, were altogether as unworthy to be esteemed divine as the mythology of the vulgar. How then must we determine? If Horace were a good and orthodox heathen, how came Juvenal to be such an ungracious libertine in principle, as to ridicule the doctrines which the other held as sacred? Their opportunities of information, and their mental advantages, were equal. I feel myself rather inclined to believe, that Juvenal's avowed infidelity was sincere, and that Horace was no better than a canting hypocritical professor.

You must grant me a dispensation for saying any thing, whether it be sense or nonsense, upon the subject of politics. It is truly a matter in which I am so little interested, that were it not that it sometimes serves me for a theme when I

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can find no other, I should never mention it. I would forfeit a large sum if, advertising a month in the *Gazette*, the minister of the day, whoever he may be, could discover a man that cares about him or his measures so little as I do. When I say that I would forfeit a large sum, I mean to have it understood, that I would forfeit such a sum, if I had it. If Mr Pitt be indeed a virtuous man, as such I respect him. But at the best, I fear that he will have to say at last with Æneas,

Si Pergama dextra
Defendi possent, etiàm hâc defensa fuissent.*

Be he what he may, I do not like his taxes. At least, I am much disposed to quarrel with some of them. The additional duty upon candles, by which the poor will be much affected, hurts me most. He says, indeed, that they will but little feel it, because even now they can hardly afford the use of them. He had certainly put no compassion into his budget, when he produced from it this tax, and such an argument to support it. Justly translated, it seems to amount to this,—"Make the necessaries of life too expensive for the poor to reach them, and you will save their money. If they buy but few candles, they will pay but little tax, and if they buy none, the tax, as to them, will be annihilated." True. But, in the meantime, they will break their shins against their furniture, if they have any, and will be but little the richer, when the hours, in which they might work if they could see, shall be deducted.

I have bought a great dictionary, and want nothing but Latin authors to furnish me with the use of it. Had I purchased them first, I had begun at the right end; but I could not afford it. I beseech you admire my prudence.

Vivite, valete, et mementote nostrûm.

Yours affectionately, W C.

* If by a mortal hand my father's throne
Could be defended—'twas by mine alone.
DRYDEN, *Æneid*, II. 388.

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164. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

VINCENT BOURNE'S LATIN POEMS — HUME'S ESSAY ON SUICIDE.

July 12, 1784.

MY DEAR WILLIAM, — I think with you that Vinny's line is not pure. If he knew any authority that would have justified his substitution of a participle for a substantive, he would have done well to have noted it in the margin. But I am much inclined to think that he did not. Poets are sometimes exposed to difficulties insurmountable by lawful means, whence I imagine was originally derived that indulgence that allows them the use of what is called the *poetica licentia*. But that liberty, I believe, contents itself with the abbreviation or protraction of a word, or an alteration in the quantity of a syllable, and never presumes to trespass upon grammatical propriety. I have dared to attempt to correct my master, but am not bold enough to say that I have succeeded. Neither am I sure that my memory serves me correctly with the line that follows; but when I recollect the English, am persuaded that it cannot differ much from the true one. This, therefore, is my edition of the passage, —

Basia amatori tot tum permissa beato.

Or,

Basia quæ juveni indulsit Susanna beato
Navarcha optaret maximus esse sua.

The preceding lines I have utterly forgotten, and am consequently at a loss to know whether the distich, thus managed, will connect itself with them easily, and as it ought.

We thank you for the drawing of your house. I never knew my idea of what I had never seen resemble the original so much. At some time or other, you have doubtless given me an exact account of it, and I have retained the faithful impression made by your description. It is a comfortable abode, and the time I hope will come when I shall enjoy more than the mere representation of it.

I have not yet read the last Review, but dipping into it I accidentally fell upon their account of Hume's Essay on Suicide.* I am glad that they have liberality enough to condemn the licentiousness of an author whom they so much

* See Life for an incident connected with this Essay.

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admire. I say liberality, for there is as much bigotry in the world to that man's errors as there is in the hearts of some sectaries to their peculiar modes and tenets. He is the Pope of thousands, as blind and presumptuous as himself. God certainly infatuates those who will not see. It were otherwise impossible, that a man, naturally shrewd and sensible, and whose understanding has had all the advantages of constant exercise and cultivation, could have satisfied himself, or have hoped to satisfy others, with such palpable sophistry as has not even the grace of fallacy to recommend it. His silly assertion that because it would be no sin to divert the course of the Danube, therefore it is none to let out a few ounces of blood from an artery, would justify not suicide only, but homicide also. For the lives of ten thousand men are of less consequence to their country, than the course of that river to the regions through which it flows. Population would soon make society amends for the loss of her ten thousand members, but the loss of the Danube would be felt by all the millions that dwell upon its banks, to all generations. But the life of a man and the water of a river can never come into competition with each other in point of value, unless in the estimation of an unprincipled philosopher.

I thank you for your offer of the classics. When I want I will borrow. Horace is my own. Homer, with a clavis, I have had possession of some years. They are the property of Mr Jones. A Virgil, the property of Mr S———, I have had as long. I am nobody in the affair of tenses, unless when you are present.— Yours ever, W. C.

155.—TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

A VISIT TO BEDLAM.

July 19, 1784.

In those days when Bedlam was open to the cruel curiosity of holyday ramblers, I have been a visitor there. Though a boy, I was not altogether insensible of the misery of the poor captives, nor destitute of feeling for them. But the madness of some of them had such a humorous air, and displayed itself in so many whimsical freaks, that it was impossible not to be entertained, at the same time that I was angry with myself for being so. A line of Bourne's is very expressive of the spectacle which this world exhibits, tragi-comical as

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the incidents of it are, absurd in themselves, but terrible in their consequences:

Sunt res humanæ flebile ludibrium.

An instance of this deplorable merriment has occurred, in the course of last week, at Olney. A feast gave the occasion to a catastrophe truly shocking.— Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

166. — TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

ON HIS DEPARTURE FOR LYMINGTON— GILPIN'S LIVES OF THE REFORMERS— FRIENDSHIP IN AGE.

July 28, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — I may perhaps be short, but am not willing that you should go to Lymington without first having had a line from me. I know that place well, having spent six weeks there, above twenty years ago. The town is neat, and the country delightful. You walk well, and will consequently find a part of the coast, called Hall Cliff, within the reach of your ten toes. It was a favourite walk of mine; to the best of my remembrance, about three miles distant from Lymington. There you may stand upon the beach, and contemplate the Needle Rock. At least, you might have done so twenty years ago. But since that time I think it is fallen from its base, and is drowned, and is no longer a visible object of contemplation. I wish you may pass your time there happily, as in all probability you will, perhaps usefully too to others, undoubtedly so to yourself.

The manner in which you have been previously made acquainted with Mr Gilpin,* gives a providential air to your

* The Reverend William Gilpin, prebendary of Salisbury, and rector of Boldre, in New Forest, wrote Lives of Bernard Gilpin, the reformer of the sixteenth century, and of Wickliffe. As the biographer of these Christian reformers, he is tainted with the errors of Episcopalian and Catholic writers on the same subject; for both churches agree in similar prejudices against a popular form of ecclesiastical government, which rejects an hierarchy of unequal rank, with unscriptural privileges and worldly distinctions. Hence the strictures in the text. But as a writer on taste and the fine arts, Mr Gilpin is justly entitled to the high estimation he now enjoys. Though some inaccuracies may, perhaps, be detected in his theory, there can be but one opinion as to the exceeding beauty of his practical observations on Nature. His best work, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, has lately been edited, with extensive and exquisitely descriptive additions, by Sir Thomas Dick Lauder. The two volumes

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journey, and affords reason to hope that you may be charged with a message to him. I admire him as a biographer. But as Mrs Unwin and I were talking of him last night, we could not but wonder that a man should see so much excellence in the lives, and so much glory and beauty in the deaths, of the martyrs whom he has recorded, and at the same time disapprove the principles that produced the very conduct he admired. It seems, however, a step towards the truth, to applaud the fruits of it; and one cannot help thinking that one step more would put him in possession of the truth itself. By your means may he be enabled to take it!

We are obliged to you for the preference you would have given to Olney, had not Providence determined your course another way. But as, when we saw you last summer, you gave us no reason to expect you this, we are the less disappointed. At your age and mine, biennial visits have such a gap between them, that we cannot promise ourselves upon those terms very numerous future interviews. But whether ours are to be many or few, you will always be welcome to me, for the sake of the comfortable days that are past. In my present state of mind, my friendship for you indeed is as warm as ever. But I feel myself very indifferently qualified to be your companion. Other days than these inglorious and unprofitable ones are promised me, and when I see them, I shall rejoice.

I saw the advertisement of your adversary's book. He is happy at least in this, that, whether he have brains or none, he strikes without the danger of being stricken again. He could not wish to engage in a controversy upon easier terms. The other, whose publication is postponed till Christmas, is resolved I suppose to do something. But do what he will, he cannot prove that you have not been aspersed, or that you have not refuted the charge; which unless he can do, I think he will do little to the purpose.

Mrs Unwin thinks of you, and always with a grateful recollection of your's and Mrs Newton's kindness. She has had a nervous fever lately. But I hope she is better. The weather forbids walking, a prohibition hurtful to us both.

We heartily wish you a good journey, and are affectionately yours,

W. C. & M. U.

in which this edition is comprised, are adapted alike to be a manual to the artist and the man of general taste, to the practical arboriculturist and the landed proprietor.

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167. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

CONGRATULATIONS ON HIS RETURN FROM A JOURNEY — RECREATIONS AT OLNEY — READING — NATIVES OF THE PACIFIC OCEAN.

August 14, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — I give you joy of a journey performed without trouble or danger. You have travelled five hundred miles without having encountered either. Some neighbours of ours, about a fortnight since, made an excursion only to a neighbouring village, and brought home with them fractured skulls and broken limbs, and one of them is dead. For my own part, I seem pretty much exempted from the dangers of the road. Thanks to that tender interest and concern which the legislature takes in my security! Having no doubt their fears, lest so precious a life should determine too soon, and by some untimely stroke of misadventure, they have made wheels and horses so expensive, that I am not likely to owe my death to either.

Your mother and I continue to visit Weston daily, and find in those agreeable bowers such amusement as leaves us but little room to regret that we can go no farther. Having touched that theme, I cannot abstain from the pleasure of telling you that our neighbours in that place, being about to leave it for some time, and meeting us there but a few evenings before their departure, entreated us during their absence to consider the garden, and all its contents, as our own, and to gather whatever we liked, without the least scruple. We accordingly picked strawberries as often as we went, and brought home as many bundles of honeysuckles as served to perfume our dwelling till they returned.

Once more, by the aid of Lord Dartmouth, I find myself a voyager in the Pacific Ocean. In our last night's lecture we made our acquaintance with the island of Hapaee, where we had never been before. The French and Italians, it seems, have but little cause to plume themselves on account of their achievements in the dancing way; and we may hereafter, without much repining at it, acknowledge their superiority in that art. They are equalled, perhaps excelled, by savages. How wonderful, that without any intercourse with a politer world, and having made no proficiency in any other accomplishment, they should in this however have made themselves such adepts, that for regularity and grace of motion they might

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even be our masters. How wonderful, too, that with a tub and a stick they should be able to produce such harmony, as persons accustomed to the sweetest music cannot but hear with pleasure. Is it not very difficult to account for the striking difference of character that obtains among the inhabitants of these islands? Many of them are near neighbours to each other; their opportunities of improvement much the same; yet some of them are in a degree polite, discover symptoms of taste, and have a sense of elegance; while others are as rude as we naturally expect to find a people who have never had any communication with the northern hemisphere. These volumes furnish much matter of philosophical speculation, and often entertain me even while I am not employed in reading them.

I am sorry you have not been able to ascertain the doubtful intelligence I have received on the subject of cork skirts and bosoms. I am now every day occupied in giving all the grace I can to my new production, and in transcribing it. I shall soon arrive at the passage that censures that folly, which I shall be loth to expunge, but which I must not spare, unless the criminals can be convicted. The world, however, is not so unproductive of subjects of censure, but that it may probably supply me with some other that may serve me as well.

If you know any body that is writing, or intends to write, an epic poem on the new regulation of *franks*, you may give him my compliments, and these two lines for a beginning—

Heu quot amatores nunc torquet epistola rara!
Vectigal certum, perituraque gratia FRANKI!

Yours faithfully, W. C.

168. — TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

HIS AMUSEMENTS — CAPTAIN COOK'S LAST VOYAGE — DANCING SAVAGES.

August 16, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — Had you not expressed a desire to hear from me before you take leave of Lymington, I certainly should not have answered you so soon. Knowing the place, and the amusements it affords, I should have had more modesty than to suppose myself capable of adding any thing to your present entertainments worthy to rank with them. I am not, however, totally destitute of such pleasures as an inland country may pretend to. If my windows do not command a

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view of the ocean, at least they look out upon a profusion of mignonette; which, if it be not so grand an object, is however quite as fragrant; and if I have not a hermit in a grotto, I have nevertheless myself in a green-house, a less venerable figure perhaps, but not at all less animated than he; nor are we in this nook altogether unfurnished with such means of philosophical experiment and speculation as at present the world rings with. On Thursday morning last, we sent up a balloon from Emberton Meadow. Thrice it rose, and as oft descended, and in the evening it performed another flight at Newport, where it went up, and came down no more. Like the arrow discharged at the pigeon in the Trojan games, it kindled in the air, and was consumed in a moment. I have not heard what interpretation the soothsayers have given to the omen, but shall wonder a little if the Newton shepherd prognosticate any thing less from it than the most bloody war that was ever waged in Europe.

I am reading Cook's last voyage, and am much pleased and amused with it. It seems that in some of the Friendly Isles, they excel so much in dancing, and perform that operation with such exquisite delicacy and grace, that they are not surpassed even upon our European stages. Oh! that Vestris had been in the ship, that he might have seen himself outdone by a savage. The paper indeed tells us that the Queen of France has clapped this king of capers up in prison, for declining to dance before her, on a pretence of sickness, when in fact he was in perfect health. If this be true, perhaps he may by this time be prepared to second such a wish as mine, and to think that the durance he suffers would be well exchanged for a dance at Annamooka. I should, however, as little have expected to hear that these islanders had such consummate skill in an art that requires so much taste in the conduct of the person, as that they were good mathematicians and astronomers. Defective as they are in every branch of knowledge, and in every other species of refinement, it seems wonderful that they should arrive at such perfection in the dance, which some of our English gentlemen, with all the assistance of French instruction, find it impossible to learn. We must conclude, therefore, that particular nations have a genius for particular feats, and that our neighbours in France, and our friends in the South Sea, have minds very nearly akin, though they inhabit countries so very remote from each other.

Mrs Unwin remembers to have been in company with Mr

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Gilpin at her brother's. She thought him very sensible and polite, and consequently very agreeable.

We are truly glad that Mrs Newton and yourself are so well, and that there is reason to hope that Eliza is better. You will learn from this letter that we are so, and that for my own part I am not quite so low in spirits as at some times. Learn too, what you knew before, that we love you all, and that I am your affectionate friend, W. C.

169.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

WITH THE MANUSCRIPT OF THE TASK—HIS MOTIVES IN WRITING THAT POEM.

OLNEY, *September* 11, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You have my thanks for the inquiries you have made. Despairing, however, of meeting with such confirmation of that new mode as would warrant a general stricture, I had, before the receipt of your last, discarded the passage in which I had censured it.* I am proceeding in my transcript with all possible despatch, having nearly finished the fourth book, and hoping, by the end of the month, to have completed the work. When finished, that no time may be lost, I purpose taking the first opportunity to transmit it to Leman Street; but must beg that you will give me in your next an exact direction, that it may proceed to the mark without any hazard of a miscarriage. A second transcript of it would be a labour I should very reluctantly undertake; for though I have kept copies of all the material alterations, there are many minutiæ of which I have made none: it is besides slavish work, and of all occupations that which I dislike the most. I know that you will lose no time in reading it, but I must beg you likewise to lose none in conveying it to Johnson, that if he chooses to print it, it may go to the press immediately; if not, that it may be offered directly to your friend Longman, or any other. Not that I doubt Johnson's acceptance of it, for he will find it more *ad captum populi* than the former. I have not numbered the lines, except of the four first books, which amount to three thousand two hundred and seventy-six. I imagine therefore that the whole contains about five thousand. I mention this circumstance

* A passage censuring cork bosoms. See Letter 167. The reader will not regret the omission.

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exception. I should not, indeed, think of keeping a goose in a cage, that I might hang him up in the parlour for the sake of his melody, but a goose upon a common, or in a farm yard, is no bad performer. And as to insects, if the black beetle, and beetles, indeed, of all hues, will keep out of my way, I have no objection to any of the rest; on the contrary, in whatever key they sing, from the gnat's fine treble to the bass of the humble bee, I admire them all. Seriously, however, it strikes me as a very observable instance of providential kindness to man, that such an exact accord has been contrived between his ear, and the sounds with which, at least in a rural situation, it is almost every moment visited. All the world is sensible of the uncomfortable effect that certain sounds have upon the nerves, and consequently upon the spirits: and if a sinful world had been filled with such as would have curdled the blood, and have made the sense of hearing a perpetual inconvenience, I do not know that we should have had a right to complain. But now the fields, the woods, the gardens, have each their concert, and the ear of man is for ever regaled by creatures who seem only to please themselves. Even the ears that are deaf to the Gospel are continually entertained, though, without knowing it, by sounds for which they are solely indebted to its Author. There is somewhere in infinite space a world that does not roll within the precincts of mercy, and as it is reasonable, and even scriptural, to suppose that there is music in heaven, in those dismal regions perhaps the reverse of it is found; tones so dismal, as to make wo itself more insupportable, and to acuminate even despair. But my paper admonishes me in good time to draw the reins, and to check the descent of my fancy into deeps, with which she is but too familiar. Our best love attends you both. — Yours, W. C.

172. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

THE TASK — PAUSES IN BLANK VERSE — THE THROCKMORTONS.

October 2, 1784.

MY DEAR WILLIAM, — A poet can but ill spare time for prose. The truth is, I am in haste to finish my transcript, that you may receive it time enough to give it a leisurely reading before you go to town; which, whether I shall be able to accomplish, is at present uncertain. I have the whole punctuation to settle, which in blank verse is of the last

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importance, and of a species peculiar to that composition; for I know no use of points, unless to direct the voice, the management of which, in the reading of blank verse, being more difficult than in the reading of any other poetry, requires perpetual hints and notices to regulate the inflections, cadences, and pauses. This, however, is an affair, that in spite of grammarians must be left pretty much *ad libitum scriptoris*. For I suppose every author points according to his own reading. If I can send the parcel to the wagon by one o'clock next Wednesday, you will have it on Saturday the ninth. But this is more than I expect. Perhaps I shall not be able to despatch it till the eleventh, in which case it will not reach you till the thirteenth. I rather think that the latter of these two periods will obtain, because, besides the punctuation, I have the argument of each book to transcribe. Add to this, that in writing for the printer, I am forced to write my best, which makes slow work. The motto of the whole is, *Fit surculus arbor*.* If you can put the author's name under it, do so—if not, it must go without one. For I know not to whom to ascribe it. It was a motto taken by a certain prince of Orange, in the year 1733, but not to a poem of his own writing, or indeed to any poem at all, but, as I think, to a medal.

Mr ——— is a Cornish member; but for what place in Cornwall I know not. All I know of him is, that I saw him once clap his two hands upon a rail, meaning to leap over it; but he did not think the attempt a safe one, and therefore took them off again. He was in company with Mr Throckmorton. With that gentleman we drank chocolate, since I wrote last. The occasion of our visit was, as usual, a balloon. Your mother invited her, and I him, and they promised to return the visit, but have not yet performed. *Tout le monde se trouvoit là*,† as you may suppose, among the rest, Mrs W———. She was driven to the door by her son, a boy of seventeen, in a phæton, drawn by four horses from Lilliput. This is an ambiguous expression; and should what I write now be legible a thousand years hence, might puzzle commentators. Be it known, therefore, to the Aldusses and the Stevenses of ages yet to come, that I do not mean to affirm that Mrs W——— herself came from Lilliput that morning, or indeed that she ever was there, but merely to describe the horses as being so diminutive, that they might be, with propriety, said to be Lilliputian.

* A twig is become a tree. † All the world was there.

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The privilege of franking having been so cropped, I know not in what manner I and my bookseller are to settle the conveyance of proof sheets hither, and back again. They must travel, I imagine, by coach, a large quantity of them at a time; for, like other authors, I find myself under a poetical necessity of being frugal.

We love you all, jointly and separately, as usual.

W. C.

I have not seen, nor shall see, the Dissenter's answer to Mr Newton, unless you can furnish me with it.

173.—TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

UNCONNECTED THOUGHTS — REFLECTIONS ON THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN COOK.

October 9, 1784.

My dear Friend,— The pains you have taken to disengage our correspondence from the expense with which it was threatened, convincing me that my letters, trivial as they are, are yet acceptable to you, encourage me to observe my usual punctuality. You complain of unconnected thoughts. I believe there is not a head in the world but might utter the same complaint, and that all would do so, were they all as attentive to their own vagaries, and as honest as yours. The description of your meditations at least suits mine; perhaps I can go a step beyond you, upon the same ground, and assert with the strictest truth that I not only do not think with connection, but that I frequently do not think at all. I am much mistaken if I do not often catch myself napping in this way; for when I ask myself what was the last idea, (as the ushers at Westminster ask an idle boy what was the last word,) I am not able to answer, but, like the boy in question, am obliged to stare and say nothing. This may be a very unphilosophical account of myself, and may clash very much with the general opinion of the learned, that the soul being an active principle, and her activity consisting in thought, she must consequently always think. But pardon me, messieurs les philosophes, there are moments when, if I think at all, I am utterly unconscious of doing so, and the thought, and the consciousness of it, seem to me at least, who am no philosopher, to be inseparable from each other. Perhaps, however, we may both be right; and if you will grant me that I do not always think, I will in return concede to you

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the activity you contend for, and will qualify the difference between us by supposing that though the soul be in herself an active principle, the influence of her present union with a principle that is not such, makes her often dormant, suspends her operations, and affects her with a sort of deliquium, in which she suffers a temporary loss of all her functions. I have related to you my experience truly, and without disguise; you must therefore either admit my assertion, that the soul does not necessarily always act, or deny that mine is a human soul: a negative, that I am sure you will not easily prove. So much for a dispute which I little thought of being engaged in to-day.

Last night I had a letter from Lord Dartmouth. It was to apprise me of the safe arrival of Cook's last voyage, which he was so kind as to lend me, in Saint James's square. The reading of those volumes afforded me much amusement, and I hope some instruction. No observation, however, forced itself upon me with more violence than one that I could not help making on the death of Captain Cook. God is a jealous God, and at Owhyhee the poor man was content to be worshipped. From that moment, the remarkable interposition of Providence in his favour was converted into an opposition that thwarted all his purposes. He left the scene of his deification, but was driven back to it by a most violent storm, in which he suffered more than in any that had preceded it. When he departed, he left his worshippers still infatuated with an idea of his godship, consequently well disposed to serve him. At his return, he found them sullen, distrustful, and mysterious. A trifling theft was committed, which, by a blunder of his own in pursuing the thief after the property had been restored, was magnified to an affair of the last importance. One of their favourite chiefs was killed, too, by a blunder. Nothing, in short, but blunder and mistake attended him, till he fell breathless into the water, and then all was smooth again. The world, indeed, will not take notice, or see, that the dispensation bore evident marks of divine displeasure; but a mind, I think, in any degree spiritual cannot overlook them. We know from truth itself, that the death of Herod was for a similar offence. But Herod was in no sense a believer in God, nor had enjoyed half the opportunities with which our poor countryman had been favoured. It may be urged, perhaps, that he was in jest, that he meant nothing but his own amusement, and that of his companions. I doubt it. He knows little of the

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heart, who does not know that, even in a sensible man, it is flattered by every species of exaltation. But be it so, that he was in sport—it was not humane, to say no worse of it, to sport with the ignorance of his friends, to mock their simplicity, to humour and acquiesce in their blind credulity. Besides, though a stock or stone may be worshipped blameless, a baptised man may not. He knows what he does, and by suffering such honours to be paid him, incurs the guilt of sacrilege.*

We are glad that your are so happy in your church, in your society, and in all your connections. I have not left myself room to say any thing of the love we feel for you.—Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

174.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

SUBJECT OF THE TASK — ITS RELIGIOUS VIEWS — ORIGINALITY OF ITS DESCRIPTIONS — PLAN.

October 10, 1784.

My dear William,—I send you four quires of verse; which, having sent, I shall dismiss from my thoughts, and think no more of, till I see them in print. I have not, after all, found time or industry enough, to give the last hand to points. I believe, however, they are not very erroneous, though in so long a work, and in a work that requires nicety in this particular, some inaccuracies will escape. Where you find any, you will oblige me by correcting them.

In some passages, especially in the second book, you will observe me very satirical. Writing on such subjects, I could not be otherwise. I can write nothing without aiming, at least, at usefulness. It were beneath my years to do it, and still more dishonourable to my religion. I know that a reformation of such abuses as I have censured is not to be expected from the efforts of a poet; but to contemplate the

* Having enjoyed, in the year 1772, the pleasure of conversing with this illustrious seaman, on board his own ship, the Resolution, I cannot pass the present letter without observing, that I am persuaded my friend Cowper utterly misapprehended the behaviour of Captain Cook, in the affair alluded to. From the little personal aquaintance which I had myself with this humane and truly Christian navigator, and from the whole tenor of his life, I cannot believe it possible for him to have acted, under any circumstances, with such impious arrogance as might appear offensive in the eyes of the Almighty.— Hayley.

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world, its follies, its vices, its indifference to duty, and its strenuous attachment to what is evil, and not to reprehend, were to approve it. From this charge, at least, I shall be clear, for I have neither tacitly nor expressly flattered either its characters or its customs. I have paid one, and only one compliment, which was so justly due, that I did not know how to withhold it, especially having so fair an occasion, (I forget myself, there is another in the first book to Mr Throckmorton;) but the compliment I mean is to Mr ——.* It is, however, so managed, that nobody but himself can make the application, and you, to whom I disclose the secret; a delicacy on my part, which so much delicacy on his obliged me to the observance of!

What there is of a religious cast in the volume I have thrown towards the end of it, for two reasons — first, that I might not revolt the reader at his entrance — and secondly, that my best impressions might be made last. Were I to write as many volumes as Lopez de Vega or Voltaire, not one of them would be without this tincture. If the world like it not, so much the worse for them. I make all the concessions I can, that I may please them, but I will not please them at the expense of my conscience.

My descriptions are all from Nature, — not one of them second handed. My delineations of the heart are from my own experience, — not one of them borrowed from books, or in the least degree conjectural. In my numbers, which I have varied as much as I could — for blank verse without variety of numbers, is no better than bladder and string — I have imitated nobody, though sometimes, perhaps, there may be an apparent resemblance; because, at the same time that I would not imitate, I have not affectedly differed.

If the work cannot boast a regular plan, (in which respect, however, I do not think it altogether indefensible,) it may yet boast, that the reflections are naturally suggested always by the preceding passage, and that except the fifth book, which is rather of a political aspect, the whole has one tendency, — to discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure, as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue.

If it pleases you I shall be happy, and collect from your pleasure in it, an omen of its general acceptance. — Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

* Mr Thornton, the secret benefactor of the poor of Olney. See Life.

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175. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

TIROCINIUM — OFFER OF THE DEDICATION TO MR UNWIN — INDEPENDENCE AS TO PUBLISHING — CORRECTIONS.

October 20, 1784.

My dear William, — Your letter has relieved me from some anxiety, and given me a good deal of positive pleasure. I have faith in your judgment, and an implicit confidence in the sincerity of your approbation. The writing of so long a poem is a serious business; and the author must know little of his own heart, who does not in some degree suspect himself of partiality to his own production; and who is he that would not be mortified by the discovery, that he had written five thousand lines in vain? The poem, however, which you have in hand will not of itself make a volume so large as the last, or as a bookseller would wish. I say this, because when I had sent Johnson five thousand verses, he applied for a thousand more. Two years since, I began a piece which grew to the length of two hundred, and there stopped. I have lately resumed it, and, I believe, shall finish it. But the subject is fruitful, and will not be comprised in a smaller compass than seven or eight hundred verses. It turns on the question, whether an education at school or at home be preferable, and I shall give the preference to the latter. I mean that it shall pursue the track of the former, — that is to say, that it shall visit Stock in its way to publication. My design also is to inscribe it to you. But you must see it first; and if, after having seen it, you should have any objection, though it should be no bigger than the tittle of an *i*, I will deny myself that pleasure, and find no fault with your refusal. I have not been without thoughts of adding John Gilpin at the tail of all. He has made a good deal of noise in the world, and perhaps it may not be amiss to shew, that though I write generally with a serious intention, I know how to be occasionally merry. The Critical Reviewers charged me with an attempt at humour. John having been more celebrated upon the score of humour than most pieces that have appeared in modern days, may serve to exonerate me from the imputation: but in this article I am entirely under your judgment, and mean to be set down by it. All these together will make an octavo like the last. I should have told you, that the piece which now employs me is in rhyme. I do not intend to

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write any more blank. It is more difficult than rhyme, and not so amusing in the composition. If, when you make the offer of my book to Johnson, he should stroke his chin, and look up to the ceiling and cry—"Humph!"—anticipate him, I beseech you, at once, by saying—"that you know I should be sorry that he should undertake for me to his own disadvantage, or that my volume should be in any degree pressed upon him. I make him the offer merely because I think he would have reason to complain of me, if I did not." But that punctilio once satisfied, it is a matter of indifference to me what publisher sends me forth. If Longman should have difficulties, which is the more probable, as I understand from you that he does not in these cases see with his own eyes, but will consult a brother poet, take no pains to conquer them. The idea of being hawked about, and especially of your being the hawker, is insupportable. Nichols, I have heard, is the most learned printer of the present day. He may be a man of taste as well as learning; and I suppose that you would not want a gentleman usher to introduce you. He prints the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and may serve us, if the others should decline; if not, give yourself no farther trouble about the matter. I may possibly envy authors, who can afford to publish at their own expense, and in that case should write no more. But the mortification would not break my heart.

I proceed to your corrections, for which I most unaffectedly thank you, adverting to them in their order.

Page 140. Truth generally, without the article *the*, would not be sufficiently defined. There are many sorts of truth, philosophical, mathematical, moral, &c.; and a reader, not much accustomed to hear of religious or scriptural truth, might possibly, and indeed easily doubt what truth was particularly intended. I acknowledge that *grace*, in my use of the word, does not often occur in poetry. So neither does the subject which I handle. Every subject has its own terms, and religious ones take theirs with most propriety from the Scripture. Thence I take the word *grace*. The sarcastic use of it in the mouths of infidels I admit, but not their authority to proscribe it, especially as God's favour in the abstract has no other word, in all our language, by which it can be expressed.

Page 150. *Impress the mind faintly, or not at all.* I prefer this line, because of the interrupted run of it, having always observed that a little unevenness of this sort, in a long

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work, has a good effect—used, I mean, sparingly, and with discretion.

Page 127.—This should have been noted first, but was overlooked. Be pleased to alter for me thus, with the difference of only one word from the alteration proposed by you,—

> We too are friends to royalty. We love
> The king who loves the law, respects his bounds,
> And reigns content within them.

You observed probably, in your second reading, that I allow the life of an animal to be fairly taken away, when it interferes either with the interest or convenience of man. Consequently snails, and all reptiles that spoil our crops, either of fruit or grain, may be destroyed, if we can catch them. It gives me real pleasure, that Mrs Unwin so readily understood me. Blank verse, by the unusual arrangement of the words, and by the frequent infusion of one line into another, not less than by the style, which requires a kind of tragical magnificence, cannot be chargeable with much obscurity, must rather be singularly perspicuous, to be so easily comprehended. It is my labour, and my principal one, to be as clear as possible. You do not mistake me, when you suppose that I have great respect for the virtue that flies temptation. It is that sort of prowess which the whole train of Scripture calls upon us to manifest, when assailed by sensual evil. Interior mischiefs must be grappled with. There is no flight from them. But solicitations to sin, that address themselves to our bodily senses, are, I believe, seldom conquered in any other way.

I can easily see that you may have very reasonable objections to my dedicatory proposal. You are a clergyman, and I have banged your order. You are a child of *alma mater*, and I have banged her too. Lay yourself, therefore, under no constraints that I do not lay you under, but consider yourself as perfectly free.

With our best love to you all, I bid you heartily farewell. I am tired of this endless scribblement. Adieu!—Yours,

W. C.

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176.—TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

REFLECTIONS ON SAVAGE VIRTUE—GRADUAL PROGRESS IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE TASK.

October 30, 1784.

My dear Friend,—I accede most readily to the justness of your remark on the subject of the truly Roman heroism of the Sandwich islanders. Proofs of such prowess, I believe, are seldom exhibited by a people who have attained to a high degree of civilization. Refinement and profligacy of principle are too nearly allied, to admit of any thing so noble; and I question whether any instances of faithful friendship, like that which so much affected you in the behaviour of the poor savage, were produced even by the Romans themselves, in the latter days of the empire. They had been a nation whose virtues it is impossible not to wonder at. But Greece, which was to them what France is to us, a Pandora's box of mischief, reduced them to her own standard, and they naturally soon sunk still lower.* Religion in this case seems pretty much out of the question. To the production of such heroism, undebauched Nature herself is equal. When Italy was a land of heroes, she knew no more of the true God than her cicisbèos and her fiddlers know now; and indeed it seems a matter of indifference, whether a man be born under a truth which does not influence him, or under the actual influence of a lie; or if there be any difference between the two cases, it seems to be rather in favour of the latter: for a false persuasion, such as the Mahometan for instance, may animate the courage, and furnish motives for the contempt of death, while despisers of the true religion are punished for their folly by being abandoned to the last degrees of depravity.

* This is unjust. There is no necessary connection between refinement and profligacy, but the very reverse: real refinement leads directly to nobility of thought and action. The Greeks became profligate only after they had become slaves; but the age of their genuine refinement was also the age of liberty. The Romans, their conquerors, never equalled them in that refinement, though they rivalled them in the luxury, effeminacy, and vice of a degraded and fallen people. We greatly suspect, as to the modern allusion, that our own follies, absurdities, and profligacy are hardly less than those of our neighbours; while foreigners display at least the good sense to rest satisfied with foibles of their own growth, which consequently sit easily upon them, without gratuitously incurring the ridicule of awkward imitation of exotic folly.

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Accordingly we see a Sandwich islander sacrificing himself to his dead friend, and our Christian seamen and mariners, instead of being impressed by a sense of his generosity, butchering him with a persevering cruelty that will disgrace them for ever; for he was a defenceless, unresisting enemy, who meant nothing more than to gratify his love for the deceased. To slay him in such circumstances was to murder him, and with every aggravation of the crime that can be imagined.

I am again at Johnson's in the shape of a poem in blank verse, consisting of six books, and called *The Task*. I began it about this time twelvemonth, and writing sometimes an hour in a day, sometimes half an one, and sometimes two hours, have lately finished it. I mentioned it not sooner, because almost to the last I was doubtful whether I should ever bring it to a conclusion, working often in such distress of mind, as while it spurred me to the work, at the same time threatened to disqualify me for it. My bookseller I suppose will be as tardy as before. I do not expect to be born into the world till the month of March, when I and the crocusses shall peep together. You may assure yourself that I shall take my first opportunity to wait on you. I mean likewise to gratify myself by obtruding my muse upon Mr Bacon.

Adieu, my dear friend! we are well, and love you.—Yours and Mrs Newton's, W. C.

177.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE PUBLISHER—REASONS FOR KEEPING LITERARY SECRETS—PROGRESS OF TIROCINIUM.

November 1, 1784.

My dear Friend,—Were I to delay my answer, I must yet write without a frank at last, and may as well therefore write without one now, especially feeling, as I do, a desire to thank you for your friendly offices so well performed. I am glad for your sake, as well as for my own, that you succeeded in the first instance, and that the first trouble proved the last. I am willing too to consider Johnson's readiness to accept a second volume of mine, as an argument that at least he was no loser by the former. I collect from it some reasonable hope that the volume in question may not wrong him neither. My imagination tells me (for I know you interest yourself in the success of my productions) that your heart fluttered when

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you approached Johnson's door, and that it felt itself discharged of a burden when you came out again. You did well to mention it at the T——s; they will now know that you do not pretend a share in my confidence, whatever be the value of it, greater than you actually possess. I wrote to Mr Newton by the last post, to tell him that I was gone to the press again. He will be surprised, and perhaps not pleased. But I think he cannot complain, for he keeps his own authorly secrets without participating them with me. I do not think myself in the least injured by his reserve; neither should I, if he were to publish a whole library without favouring me with any previous notice of his intentions. In these cases it is no violation of the laws of friendship not to communicate, though there must be a friendship where the communication is made. But many reasons may concur in disposing a writer to keep his work secret, and none of them injurious to his friends. The influence of one I have felt myself, for which none of them would blame me,—I mean the desire of surprising agreeably. And if I have denied myself this pleasure in your instance, it was only to give myself a greater, by eradicating from your mind any little weeds of suspicion that might still remain in it, that any man living is nearer to me than yourself. Had not this consideration forced up the lid of my strong box like a lever, it would have kept its contents with an invisible closeness to the last; and the first news that either you or any of my friends would have heard of the *Task*, they would have received from the public papers. But you know now, that neither as a poet, nor as a man, do I give to any man a precedence in my estimation at your expense.

I am proceeding with my new work (which at present I feel myself much inclined to call by the name of Tirocinium) as fast as the muse permits. It has reached the length of seven hundred lines, and will probably receive an addition of two or three hundred more. When you see Mr ——, perhaps you will not find it difficult to procure from him half a dozen franks, addressed to yourself, and dated the fifteenth of December, in which case, they will all go to the post filled with my lucubrations, on the evening of that day. I do not name an earlier, because I hate to be hurried; and Johnson cannot want it sooner than, thus managed, it will reach him.

I am not sorry that John Gilpin, though hitherto he has been nobody's child, is likely to be owned at last. Here and

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there I can give him a touch that I think will mend him, the language in some places not being quite so quaint and old-fashioned as it should be; and in one of the stanzas there is a false rhyme. When I have thus given the finishing stroke to his figure, I mean to grace him with two mottos, a Greek and a Latin one, which, when the world shall see that I have only a little one of three words to the volume itself, and none to the books of which it consists, they will perhaps understand as a stricture upon that pompous display of literature, with which some authors take occasion to crowd their titles. Knox, in particular, who is a sensible man too, has not, I think, fewer than half a dozen to his Essays.* —Adieu, W. C.

178. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL.

NOTE ANNOUNCING THE PRINTING OF THE TASK, &c.

November 8, 1784.

THE Task, as you know, is gone to the press: since it went I have been employed in writing another poem, which I am now transcribing, and which, in a short time, I design shall follow. It is entitled, Tirocinium, or a Review of Schools: the business and purpose of it are, to censure the want of discipline, and the scandalous inattention to morals, that obtain in them, especially in the largest; and to recommend private tuition as a mode of education preferable on all accounts; to call upon fathers to become tutors of their own sons, where that is practicable; to take home a domestic tutor, where it is not; and if neither can be done, to place them under the care of such a man as he to whom I am writing, — some rural parson, whose attention is limited to a few.

179. — TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

CONDOLENCE ON THE DEATH OF HIS MOTHER — THE TASK, TIROCINIUM, &c.

November, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — To condole with you on the death of a mother aged eighty-seven, would be absurd — rather, therefore, as is reasonable, I congratulate you on the almost

* Vicesimus Knox, D.D. Master of Tunbridge School, author of numerous works, of which the *Moral and Literary Essays* are almost the only volumes that have retained their popularity. He died in 1821.

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singular felicity of having enjoyed the company of so amiable and so near a relation so long. Your lot and mine in this respect have been very different, as indeed in almost every other. Your mother lived to see you rise, at least to see you comfortably established in the world. Mine, dying when I was six years old, did not live to see me sink in it. You may remember with pleasure, while you live, a blessing vouchsafed to you so long; and I, while I live, must regret a comfort of which I was deprived so early. I can truly say, that not a week passes (perhaps I might with equal veracity say a day) in which I do not think of her. Such was the impression her tenderness made upon me, though the opportunity she had for shewing it was so short. But the ways of God are equal; and when I reflect on the pangs she would have suffered, had she been a witness of all mine, I see more cause to rejoice than to mourn, that she was hidden in the grave so soon.

We have, as you say, lost a lively and sensible neighbour in Lady Austen, but we have been long accustomed to a state of retirement within one degree of solitude, and being naturally lovers of still life, can relapse into our former duality without being unhappy at the change. To me, indeed, a third is not necessary, while I can have the companion I have had these twenty years.

I am gone to the press again; a volume of mine will greet your hands some time either in the course of the winter, or early in the spring. You will find it perhaps, on the whole, more entertaining than the former, as it treats a greater variety of subjects, and those, at least the most, of a sublunary kind. It will consist of a poem in six books, called the Task. To which will be added another, which I finished yesterday, called, I believe, Tirocinium, on the subject of education.

You perceive that I have taken your advice, and given the pen no rest.* W. C.

* On the 12th of this month the writer commenced his translation of Homer.

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180. — TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

DEPRECATING THE IDEA OF HIS BEING NEGLECTED, IN NOT RECEIVING INFORMATION OF COWPER'S POETICAL STUDIES — OBJECTS CONTEMPLATED IN THE TASK, TIROCINIUM, &c.

November 27, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—All the interest that you take in my new publication, and all the pleas that you urge in behalf of your right to my confidence, the moment I had read your letter, struck me as so many proofs of your regard — of a friendship in which distance and time make no abatement. But it is difficult to adjust opposite claims to the satisfaction of all parties. I have done my best, and must leave it to your candour to put a just interpretation upon all that has passed, and to give me credit for it, as a certain truth, that whatever seeming defects, in point of attention and attachment to you, my conduct on this occasion may have appeared to have been chargeable with, I am in reality as clear of all real ones, as you would wish to find me.

I send you enclosed, in the first place, a copy of the advertisement to the reader, which accounts for my title, not otherwise easily accounted for — secondly, what is called an argument, or a summary of the contents of each book, more circumstantial and diffuse by far than that which I have sent to the press. It will give you a pretty accurate acquaintance with my matter, though the tenons and mortises by which the several passages are connected, and let into each other, cannot be explained in a syllabus — and lastly, an extract as you desired. The subject of it, I am sure, will please you, and as I have admitted into my description no images but what are scriptural, and have aimed as exactly as I could at the plain and simple sublimity of the scripture language, I have hopes the manner of it may please you too. As far as the numbers and diction are concerned, it may serve pretty well for a sample of the whole. But the subjects being so various, no single passage can in all respects be a specimen of the book at large.

My principal purpose is to allure the reader by character, by scenery, by imagery, and such poetical embellishments, to the reading of what may profit him. Subordinately to this, to combat that predilection in favour of a metropolis that beggars and exhausts the country, by evacuating it of all its

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principal inhabitants; and collaterally, and as far as is consistent with this double intention, to have a stroke at vice, vanity, and folly, wherever I find them. I have not spared the Universities. A letter which appeared in the General Evening Post of Saturday, said to have been received by a general officer, and by him sent to the press, as worthy of public notice, and which has all the appearance of authenticity, would alone justify the severest censure of those bodies, if any such justification were wanted. By way of supplement to what I have written on this subject, I have added a poem, called Tirocinium, which is in rhyme. It treats of the scandalous relaxation of discipline that obtains in almost all schools universally, but especially in the largest, which are so negligent in the article of morals, that boys are debauched, in general, the moment they are capable of being so. It recommends the office of tutor to the father, where there is no real impediment; the expedient of a domestic tutor, where there is; and the disposal of boys into the hands of a respectable country clergyman, who limits his attention to two, in all cases where they cannot be conveniently educated at home. Mr Unwin happily affording me an instance in point, the poem is inscribed to him. You will now, I hope, command your hunger to be patient, and be satisfied with the luncheon that I send, till dinner comes. That piecemeal perusal of the work, sheet by sheet, would be so disadvantageous to the work itself, and therefore so uncomfortable to me, that, I dare say, you will wave your desire of it. A poem, thus disjointed, cannot possibly be fit for any body's inspection but the author's.

Tully's rule,—

Nulla dies sine linea, *

will make a volume in less time than one would suppose. I adhered to it so rigidly, that though more than once I found three lines as many as I had time to compass, still I wrote; and finding occasionally, and as it might happen, a more fluent vein, the abundance of one day made me amends for the barrenness of another. But I do not mean to write blank verse again. Not having the music of rhyme, it requires so close an attention to the pause, and the cadence, and such a peculiar mode of expression, as render it, to me at least, the

* No day without a line.

Raphael, by an allowable pun, adopted this famous apophthegm as the rule of his own professional life.

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most difficult species of poetry that I have ever meddled with.

I am obliged to you, and to Mr Bacon, for your kind remembrance of me when you meet. No artist can excel as he does, without the finest feelings; and every man that has the finest feelings is, and must be amiable.—Adieu, my dear friend. Affectionately yours, W. C.

181.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

TIROCINIUM FINISHED—UNCERTAINTY OF PROGRESS IN POETICAL COMPOSITION.

November, 1784.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—The slice which, you observe, has been taken from the top of the sheet, it lost before I began to write; but being a part of the paper which is seldom used, I thought it would be pity to discard, or to degrade to meaner purposes, the fair and ample remnant, on account of so immaterial a defect. I therefore have destined it to be the vehicle of a letter, which you will accept as entire, though a lawyer perhaps would, without much difficulty, prove it to be but a fragment. The best recompense I can make you for writing without a frank is, to propose it to you to take your revenge by returning an answer under the same predicament; and the best reason I can give for doing it is the occasion following. In my last I recommended it to you to procure franks for the conveyance of Tirocinium, dated on a day therein mentioned, and the earliest, which at that time I could venture to appoint. It has happened, however, that the poem is finished a month sooner than I expected, and two-thirds of it are at this time fairly transcribed,—an accident to which the riders of a Parnassian steed are liable, who never know, before they mount him, at what rate he will choose to travel. If he be indisposed to despatch, it is impossible to accelerate his pace; if otherwise, equally impossible to stop him. Therefore my errand to you at this time is to cancel the former assignation, and to inform you that, by whatever means you please, and as soon as you please, the piece in question will be ready to attend you; for without exerting any extraordinary diligence, I shall have completed the transcript in a week.

The critics will never know, that four lines of it were composed while I had a dose of ipecacuanha on my stomach; in short, that I was delivered of the emetic and the verses in

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the same moment. Knew they this, they would at least allow me to be a poet of singular industry, and confess that I lost no time. I have heard of poets who have found cathartics of sovereign use, when they had occasion to be particularly brilliant. Dryden always used them, and in commemoration of it, Bayes in the Rehearsal is made to inform the audience, that in a poetical emergency he always had recourse to stewed prunes. But I am the only poet who has dared to reverse the prescription, and whose enterprise, having succeeded to admiration, warrants him to recommend an emetic to all future bards, as the most infallible means of producing a fluent and easy versification. My love to all your family. Adieu!

W. C.

182.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

MR NEWTON'S CHAGRIN FROM NOT HAVING BEEN CONSULTED RESPECTING THE TASK.

November 29, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am happy that you are pleased, and accept it as an earnest that I shall not at least disgust the public. For though I know your partiality to me, I know at the same time with what laudable tenderness you feel for your own reputation, and that for the sake of that most delicate part of your property, though you would not criticise me with an unfriendly and undue severity, you would, however, beware of being satisfied too hastily, and with no warrantable cause of being so. I called you the tutor of your two sons, in contemplation of the certainty of that event: it is a fact in suspense, not in fiction.

My principal errand to you now is to give you information on the following subject: the moment Mr Newton knew—and I took care that he should learn it first from me—that I had communicated to you what I had concealed from him, and that you were my authorship's go-between with Johnson on this occasion, he sent me a most friendly letter indeed, but one in every line of which I could hear the soft murmurs of something like mortification, that could not be entirely suppressed. It contained nothing, however, that you yourself would have blamed, or that I had not every reason to consider as evidence of his regard to me. He concluded the subject with desiring to know something of my plan, to be favoured with an extract, by way of specimen, or (which he should like

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better still) with wishing me to order Johnson to send him a proof as fast as they were printed off. Determining not to accede to this last request for many reasons (but especially because I would no more shew my poem piecemeal, than I would my house, if I had one — the merits of the structure, in either case, being equally liable to suffer by such a partial view of it,) I have endeavoured to compromise the difference between us, and to satisfy him without disgracing myself. The proof sheets I have absolutely, though civilly refused. But I have sent him a copy of the arguments of each book, more dilated and circumstantial than those inserted in the work; and to these I have added an extract as he desired; selecting, as most suited to his taste, "The view of the restoration of all things," which you recollect to have seen near the end of the last book. I hold it necessary to tell you this, lest, if you should call upon him, he should startle you by discovering a degree of information upon the subject, which you could not otherwise know how to reconcile, or to account for.

You have executed your commissions *à merveille*. We not only approve, but admire. No apology was wanting for the balance struck at the bottom, which we accounted rather a beauty than a deformity. Pardon a poor poet, who cannot speak even of pounds, shillings, and pence, but in his own way.

I have read Lunardi * with pleasure. He is a lively, sensible young fellow, and I suppose a very favourable sample of the Italians. When I look at his picture, I can fancy that I see in him that good sense and courage that no doubt were legible in the face of a young Roman two thousand years ago.— Your affectionate W. C.

183. — TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

ARGUMENTS, TITLES, AND CONTENTS, OF THE SEVERAL BOOKS OF THE TASK, EXPLAINED.

December 13, 1784.

My dear Friend, — Having imitated no man, I may reasonably hope that I shall not incur the disadvantage of a comparison with my betters. Milton's manner was peculiar So is Thomson's. He that should write like either of them

* A treatise on Balloons.

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would in my judgment deserve the name of a copyist, but not a poet. A judicious and sensible reader therefore, like yourself, will not say that my manner is not good, because it does not resemble theirs, but will rather consider what it is in itself. Blank verse is susceptible of a much greater diversification of manner, than verse in rhyme: and why the modern writers of it have all thought proper to cast their numbers alike, I know not. Certainly it was not necessity that compelled them to it. I flatter myself, however, that I have avoided that sameness with others, which would entitle me to nothing but a share in one common oblivion with them all. It is possible that, as a reviewer of my former volume found cause to say that he knew not to what class of writers to refer me, the reviewer of this, whoever he shall be, may see occasion to remark the same singularity. At any rate, though as little apt to be sanguine as most men, and more prone to fear and despond than to overrate my own productions, I am persuaded that I shall not forfeit any thing by this volume that I gained by the last. As to the title, I take it to be the best that is to be had. It is not possible that a book, including such a variety of subjects, and in which no particular one is predominant, should find a title adapted to them all. In such a case, it seemed almost necessary to accommodate the name to the incident that gave birth to the poem; nor does it appear to me, that because I performed more than my task, therefore the Task is not a suitable title. A house would still be a house, though the builder of it should make it ten times as big as he at first intended. I might, indeed, following the example of the Sunday newsmonger, call it the Olio. But I should do myself wrong: for though it have much variety, it has, I trust, no confusion.

For the same reason, none of the interior titles apply themselves to the contents at large of that book to which they belong. They are, every one of them, taken either from the leading (I should say the introductory) passage of that particular book, or from that which makes the most conspicuous figure in it. Had I set off with a design to write upon a gridiron, and had I actually written near two hundred lines upon that utensil, as I have upon the Sofa, the gridiron should have been my title. But the Sofa being, as I may say, the starting post from which I addressed myself to the long race that I soon conceived a design to run, it acquired a just pre-eminence in my account, and was very worthily advanced to the titular honour it enjoys, its right being at

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least so far a good one, that no word in the language could pretend a better.

The Timepiece appears to me (though by some accident the import of that title has escaped you) to have a degree of propriety beyond the most of them. The book to which it belongs is intended to strike the hour that gives notice of approaching judgment, and dealing pretty largely in the signs of the times, seems to be denominated, as it is, with a sufficient degree of accommodation to the subject.

As to the word *worm*, it is the very appellation which Milton himself, in a certain passage of the Paradise Lost, gives to the serpent. Not having the book at hand, I cannot now refer to it, but I am sure of the fact. I am mistaken, too, if Shakespeare's Cleopatra do not call the asp, by which she thought fit to destroy herself, by the same name. But not having read the play these five-and-twenty years, I will not affirm it.* They are, however, without all doubt, convertible terms: a worm is a small serpent, and a serpent is a large worm; and when an epithet significant of the most terrible species of those creatures is adjoined, the idea is surely sufficiently ascertained. No animal of the vermicular or serpentine kind is crested, but the most formidable of all. —Yours affectionately, W. C.

184. —TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS CONNECTED WITH HIS SECOND VOLUME—BISHOP BAGOT.

December 18, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND, —I condole with you, that you had the trouble to ascend St Paul's in vain, but at the same time congratulate you, that you escaped an ague. I should be very well pleased to have a fair prospect of a balloon under sail, with a philosopher or two on board, but at the same time should be very sorry to expose myself, for any length of

* ——— How poor an instrument
May do a noble deed! ———
Hast thou the pretty *worm* of Nilus there,
That kills and pains not?
ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA, *Act V. Scene* 2.

Cowper is correct, therefore, in his authority, as he is in the use of the word. *Worm*, in the Teutonick, originally means *serpent*—a signification which we yet retain in two instances, —*slow-worm* and *blind-worm*; and the Norwegians call their fabulous sea-serpent *sea-worm*.

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time, to the rigour of the upper regions, at this season, for the sake of it. The travellers themselves, I suppose, are secured from all injuries of the weather by that fervency of spirit and agitation of mind, which must needs accompany them in their flight; advantages, which the more composed and phlegmatic spectator is not equally possessed of.

The inscription of the poem is more your own affair than any other person's. You have, therefore, an undoubted right to fashion it to your mind, nor have I the least objection to the slight alteration that you have made in it. I inserted what you have erased, for a reason that was perhaps rather chimerical than solid. I feared, however, that the reviewers, or some of my sagacious readers, not more merciful than they, might suspect that there was a secret design in the wind; and that author and friend had consulted in what manner author might introduce friend to public notice, as a clergyman every way qualified to entertain a pupil or two, if peradventure any gentleman of fortune were in want of a tutor for his children. I therefore added the words — "and of his two sons only" — by way of insinuating, that you are perfectly satisfied with your present charge, and that you do not wish for more; thus meaning to obviate an illiberal construction, which we are both of us incapable of deserving. But the same caution not having appeared to you to be necessary, I am very willing and ready to suppose that it is not so.

I intended in my last to have given you my reasons for the compliment I have paid Bishop Bagot, lest, knowing that I have no personal connection with him, you should suspect me of having done it rather too much at a venture. In the first place, then, I wished the world to know that I have no objection to a bishop, *quiá* bishop. In the second place, the brothers were all five my schoolfellows, and very amiable and valuable boys they were. Thirdly, Lewis, the bishop, had been rudely and coarsely treated in the Monthly Review, on account of a sermon, which appeared to me, when I read their extract from it, to deserve the highest commendations, as exhibiting explicit proof both of his good sense, and his unfeigned piety. For these causes me thereunto moving, I felt myself happy in an opportunity to do public honour to a worthy man, who had been publicly traduced; and indeed, the reviewers themselves have since repented of their aspersions, and have travelled not a little out of their way in order to retract them, having taken occasion, by the sermon preached at the bishop's visitation at Norwich, to say every thing

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handsome of his lordship, who, whatever might be the merit of the discourse, in that instance at least, could himself lay claim to no other than that of being a hearer.

Since I wrote, I have had a letter from Mr Newton that did not please me, and returned an answer to it that possibly may not have pleased him. We shall come together again soon, I suppose, upon as amicable terms as usual. But at present he is in a state of mortification. He would have been pleased, had the book passed out of his hands into yours, or even out of yours into his, so that he had previously had opportunity to advise a measure which I pursued without his recommendation, and had seen the poems in manuscript. But my design was to pay you a whole compliment, and I have done it. If he says more on the subject, I shall speak freely, and perhaps please him less than I have done already. Yours, with our love to all. W. C.

185.—TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

DEFENDING THE TITLE, &c. OF THE TASK — DEATH OF AN ACQUAINTANCE.

Christmas Eve, 1784.

My dear Friend,—I am neither Mede nor Persian, neither am I the son of any such, but was born at Great Berkhampsted, in Hertfordshire, and yet I can neither find a new title for my book, nor please myself with any addition to the old one. I am, however, willing to hope that, when the volume shall cast itself at your feet, you will be in some measure reconciled to the name it bears, especially when you shall find it justified both by the exordium of the poem, and by the conclusion. But enough, as you say with great truth, of a subject very unworthy of so much consideration.

Had I heard any anecdotes of poor dying ——— that would have bid fair to deserve your attention, I should have sent them. The little that he is reported to have uttered of a spiritual import, was not very striking. That little, however, I can give you upon good authority. His brother asking him how he found himself: he replied, "I am very composed, and think that I may safely believe myself entitled to a portion." The world has had much to say in his praise, and both prose and verse have been employed to celebrate him in the Northampton Mercury. But Christians, I suppose, have judged it best to be silent. If he ever drank at the fountain of life, he certainly drank also, and often too freely, of certain other

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streams, which are not to be bought without money and without price. He had virtues that dazzled the natural eye, and failings that shocked the spiritual one. But *iste dies indicabit.*

W. C.

186. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

AGREEABLE NOTHINGS IN LETTER-WRITING — MR NEWTON — DEATH OF DR JOHNSON — EPITAPH.

OLNEY, *January* 15, 1785.

MY DEAR WILLIAM, — Your letters are always welcome. You can always either find something to say, or can amuse me and yourself with a sociable and friendly way of saying nothing. I never found that a letter was the more easily written, because the writing of it had been long delayed. On the contrary, experience has taught me to answer soon, that I may do it without difficulty. It is in vain to wait for an accumulation of materials in a situation such as yours and mine, productive of few events. At the end of our expectations we shall find ourselves as poor as at the beginning.

I can hardly tell you with any certainty of information, upon what terms Mr Newton and I may be supposed to stand at present. A month, I believe, has passed, since I heard from him. But my *friseur*, having been in London in the course of this week, whence he returned last night, and having called at Hoxton, brought me his love, and an excuse for his silence, which (he said) had been occasioned by the frequency of his preachings at this season. He was not pleased that my manuscript was not first transmitted to him, and I have cause to suspect that he was even mortified at being informed, that a certain inscribed poem was not inscribed to himself. But we shall jumble together again, as people that have an affection for each other at bottom, notwithstanding now and then a slight disagreement, always do.

I know not whether Mr ——— has acted in consequence of your hint, or whether, not needing one, he transmitted to us his bounty, before he had received it. He has, however, sent us a note for twenty pounds; with which we have performed wonders, in behalf of the ragged and the starved. He is a most extraordinary young man, and, though I shall probably never see him, will always have a niche in the museum of my reverential remembrance.

The death of Dr Johnson has set a thousand scribblers to

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work, and me among the rest. While I lay in bed, waiting till I could reasonably hope that the parlour might be ready for me, I invoked the muse, and composed the following

EPITAPH.

Here Johnson lies, a sage by all allow'd,
Whom to have bred may well make England proud;
Whose prose was eloquence, by wisdom taught,
The graceful vehicle of virtuous thought;
Whose verse may claim, grave, masculine, and strong,
Superior praise to the mere poet's song;
Who many a noble gift from Heaven possess'd,
And faith at last, alone worth all the rest:
O man, immortal by a double prize,—
By fame on earth, by glory in the skies!

It is destined, I believe, to the Gentleman's Magazine, which I consider as a respectable repository for small matters, which, when intrusted to a newspaper, can expect but the duration of a day. But Nichols, having at present a small piece of mine in his hands, not yet printed, (it is called the Poplar Field, and I suppose you have it,) I wait till his obstetrical aid has brought that to light, before I send him a new one. In his last he published my epitaph upon Tiney, which, I likewise imagine, has been long in your collection.

Not a word yet from Johnson. I am easy, however, upon the subject, being assured that so long as his own interest is at stake, he will not want a monitor to remind him of the proper time to publish.

You and your family have our sincere love. Forget not to present my respectful compliments to Miss Unwin, and, if you have not done it already, thank her on my part for the very agreeable narrative of Lunardi. He is a young man, I presume, of great good sense and spirit, (his letters at least, and his enterprising turn, bespeak him such,) a man qualified to shine not only among the stars, but in the more useful, though humbler sphere of terrestrial occupation.

I have been crossing the Channel in a balloon, ever since I read of that achievement by Blanchard. I have an insatiable thirst to know the philosophical reason, why his vehicle had like to have fallen into the sea, when for aught that appears the gas was not at all exhausted. Did not the extreme cold condense the inflammable air, and cause the globe to collapse?* Tell me, and be my Apollo for ever!—Affectionately yours,

W. C.

* Cowper's solution of the phenomenon is the true one.

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187. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

POEMS CONTRIBUTED TO THE GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE — SUCCESS OF HIS POETRY.

February 7, 1785.

My dear Friend, — We live in a state of such uninterrupted retirement, in which incidents worthy to be recorded occur so seldom, that I always sit down to write with a discouraging conviction that I have nothing to say. The event commonly justifies the presage. For when I have filled my sheet, I find that I have said nothing. Be it known to you, however, that I may now at least communicate a piece of intelligence to which you will not be altogether indifferent, that I have received, and returned to Johnson, the two first proof sheets of my new publication. The business was despatched indeed a fortnight ago, since when I have heard from him no farther. From such a beginning, however, I venture to prognosticate the progress, and in due time the conclusion of the matter.

In the last Gentleman's Magazine my Poplar Field appears. I have accordingly sent up two pieces more, a Latin translation of it, which you have never seen, and another on a Rosebud, the neck of which I inadvertently broke, which, whether you have seen or not, I know not. As fast as Nichols prints off the poems I send him, I send him new ones. My remittance usually consists of two, and he publishes one of them at a time. I may indeed furnish him at this rate, without putting myself to any great inconvenience; for my last supply was transmitted to him in August, and is but now exhausted.

I communicate the following at your mother's instance, who will suffer no part of my praise to be sunk in oblivion. A certain Lord has hired a house at Clifton, in our neighbourhood, for a hunting seat. There he lives at present with his wife and daughter. They are an exemplary family in some respects, and, I believe, an amiable one in all. The Reverend Mr Jones,* the curate of that parish, who often dines with them by invitation on a Sunday, recommended my volume to their reading; and his Lordship, after having perused a part of it, expressed an ardent desire to be acquainted with the author, from motives which my great modesty will not suffer me to particularize. Mr Jones, however, like a wise man, informed

* Lady Austen's brother-in-law.

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his Lordship, that for certain special reasons and causes I had declined going into company for many years, and that, therefore, he must not hope for my acquaintance. His Lordship most civilly subjoined, that he was sorry for it. "And is that all?" say you. Now, were I to hear you say so, I should look foolish, and say—"Yes." But having you at a distance, I snap my fingers at you, and say—"No, that is not all." Mr ———, who favours us now and then with his company in an evening as usual, was not long since discoursing with that eloquence which is so peculiar to himself, on the many providential interpositions that had taken place in his favour. "He had wished for many things," he said, "which, at the time when he formed those wishes, seemed distant and improbable, some of them indeed impossible. Among other wishes that he had indulged, one was, that he might be connected with men of genius and ability: and in my connection with this worthy gentleman," said he, turning to me, "that wish, I am sure, is amply gratified." You may suppose that I felt the sweat gush out upon my forehead, when I heard this speech; and if you do, you will not be at all mistaken: so much was I delighted with the delicacy of that incense.

Thus far I proceeded easily enough; and here I laid down my pen, and spent some minutes in recollection, endeavouring to find some subject, with which I might fill the little blank that remains. But none presents itself. Farewell, therefore, and remember those who are mindful of you!

Present our love to all your comfortable fireside, and believe me ever most affectionately yours, W. C.

They that read Greek with the accents would pronounce the ι in φιλίᾳ, as an η. But I do not hold with that practice, though educated in it. I should, therefore, utter it just as I do the Latin word *filio*, taking the quantity for my guide.

188.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

INDIFFERENCE OF THE GREAT TO VIRTUE—AN AUTHOR'S IMPATIENCE—INVITATION TO OLNEY.

March 20, 1785.

My dear William,—I thank you for your letter. It made me laugh, and there are not many things capable of being contained within the dimensions of a letter, for which I see

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cause to be more thankful. I was pleased, too, to see my opinion of his Lordship's *nonchalance* upon a subject that you had so much at heart, completely verified. I do not know that the eye of a nobleman was ever dissected. I cannot help supposing, however, that were that organ, as it exists in the head of such a personage, to be accurately examined, it would be found to differ materially in its construction from the eye of a commoner; so very different is the view that men in an elevated, and in a humble station, have of the same object. What appears great, sublime, beautiful, and important, to you and to me, when submitted to my lord, or his grace, and submitted, too, with the utmost humility, is either too minute to be visible at all, or if seen, seems trivial and of no account. My supposition, therefore, seems not altogether chimerical.

In two months I have corrected proof sheets to the amount of ninety-three pages, and no more. In other words, I have received three packets. Nothing is quick enough for impatience, and I suppose that the impatience of an author has the quickest of all possible movements. It appears to me, however, that at this rate we shall not publish till next Autumn. Should you happen, therefore, to pass Johnson's door, pop in your head as you go, and just insinuate to him, that, were his remittances rather more frequent, that frequency would be no inconvenience to me. I much expected one this evening, a fortnight having now elapsed since the arrival of the last; but none came, and I felt myself a little mortified. I took up the newspaper, however, and read it. There I found that the Emperor and the Dutch are, after all their negotiations, going to war. Such reflections as these struck me. A great part of Europe is going to be involved in the greatest of all calamities,—troops are in motion—artillery is drawn together—cabinets are busied in contriving schemes of blood and devastation—thousands will perish who are incapable of understanding the dispute; and thousands, who, whatever the event may be, are little more interested in it than myself, will suffer unspeakable hardships in the course of the quarrel—Well! Mr Poet, and how then? You have composed certain verses, which you are desirous to see in print, and because the impression seems to be delayed, you are displeased, not to say dispirited. Be ashamed of yourself! you live in a world in which your feelings may find worthier subjects—be concerned for the havoc of nations, and mourn

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over your retarded volume when you find a dearth of more important tragedies!

You postpone certain topics of conference to our next meeting. When shall it take place? I do not wish for you just now, because the garden is a wilderness, and so is all the country around us. In May we shall have 'sparagus, and weather in which we may stroll to Weston; at least we may hope for it: therefore come in May; you will find us happy to receive you, and as much of your fair household as you can bring with you.

We are very sorry for your uncle's indisposition. The approach of summer seems, however, to be in his favour, that season being of all remedies for the rheumatism, I believe the most effectual.

I thank you for your intelligence concerning the celebrity of John Gilpin. You may be sure that it was agreeable — but your own feelings on occasion of that article pleased me most of all. Well, my friend, be comforted! You had not an opportunity of saying publicly, "I know the author." But the author himself will say as much for you soon, and perhaps will feel in doing so a gratification equal to your own.

In the affair of face painting, I am precisely of your opinion.

Adieu, W. C.

189. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

SUCCESS OF JOHN GILPIN — RECONCILIATION WITH MR NEWTON — EFFECT OF FAME ON THE MEMORY OF ACQUAINTANCES.

April 30, 1785.

My dear Friend, — I return you thanks for a letter so warm with the intelligence of the celebrity of John Gilpin. I little thought, when I mounted him upon my Pegasus, that he would become so famous. I have learned also, from Mr Newton, that he is equally renowned in Scotland, and that a lady there had undertaken to write a second part, on the subject of Mrs Gilpin's return to London, but not succeeding in it as she wished, she dropped it. He tells me likewise, that the head master of St Paul's school (who he is I know not) has conceived, in consequence of the entertainment that John has afforded him, a vehement desire to write to me. Let us hope he will alter his mind; for should we even exchange civilities on the occasion, Tirocinium will spoil all. The great estimation, however, in which this knight of the stone-bottles

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is held, may turn out a circumstance propitious to the volume of which his history will make a part. Those events that prove the prelude to our greatest success, are often apparently trivial in themselves, and such as seemed to promise nothing. The disappointment that Horace mentions is reversed,—we design a mug, and it proves a hogshead. It is a little hard, that I alone should be unfurnished with a printed copy of this facetious story. When you visit London next, you must buy the most elegant impression of it, and bring it with you. I thank you also for writing to Johnson. I likewise wrote to him myself. Your letter and mine together have operated to admiration. There needs nothing more but that the effect be lasting, and the whole will soon be printed. We now draw towards the middle of the fifth book of the Task. The man Johnson, is like unto some vicious horses that I have known: they would not budge till they were spurred, and when they were spurred, they would kick. So did he: his temper was somewhat disconcerted; but his pace was quickened, and I was contented.

I was very much pleased with the following sentence in Mr Newton's last,—"I am perfectly satisfied with the propriety of your proceeding as to the publication." Now therefore we are friends again. Now he once more inquires after the work, which, till he had disburdened himself of this acknowledgment, neither he nor I, in any of our letters to each other, ever mentioned. Some side-wind has wafted to him a report of those reasons by which I justified my conduct. I never made a secret of them; both your mother and I have studiously deposited them with those who we thought were most likely to transmit them to him. They wanted only a hearing, which once obtained, their solidity and cogency were such that they were sure to prevail.

You mention ———. I formerly knew the man you mention, but his elder brother much better. We were schoolfellows, and he was one of a club of seven Westminster men, to which I belonged, who dined together every Thursday. Should it please God to give me ability to perform the poet's part to some purpose, many whom I once called friends, but who have since treated me with a most magnificent indifference, will be ready to take me by the hand again, and some, whom I never held in that estimation, will like ———, (who was but a boy when I left London) boast of a connection with me which they never had. Had I the virtues, and graces, and accomplishments of St Paul himself,

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I might have them at Olney, and nobody would care a button about me, yourself and one or two more excepted. Fame begets favour, and one talent, if it be rubbed a little bright by use and practice, will procure a man more friends than a thousand virtues. Dr Johnson, I believe, in the life of one of our poets, says, that he retired from the world flattering himself that he should be regretted. But the world never missed him. I think his observation upon it is, that the vacancy made by the retreat of any individual is soon filled up; that a man may always be obscure, if he chooses to be so; and that he who neglects the world, will be by the world neglected.

Your mother and I walked yesterday in the Wilderness. As we entered the gate, a glimpse of something white, contained in a little hole in the gate-post, caught my eye. I looked again, and discovered a bird's nest, with two tiny eggs in it. By and by they will be fledged, and tailed, and get wing-feathers, and fly. My case is somewhat similar to that of the parent bird: my nest is in a little nook, here I brood and hatch, and in due time my progeny takes wing and whistles.

We wait for the time of your coming with pleasant expectations. — Yours truly, W. C.

190. — TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DESCRIPTION OF HIS STUDY.

June 25, 1785.

My dear Friend, — I write in a nook that I call my *Boudoir*. It is a summer house not much bigger than a sedan chair, the door of which opens into the garden, that is now crowded with pinks, roses, and honeysuckles, and the window into my neighbour's orchard. It formerly served an apothecary, now dead, as a smoking room; and under my feet is a trap door, which once covered a hole in the ground, where he kept his bottles. At present, however, it is dedicated to sublimer uses. Having lined it with garden mats, and furnished it with a table and two chairs, here I write all that I write in summer time, whether to my friends or to the public. It is secure from all noise, and a refuge from all intrusion; for intruders sometimes trouble me in the winter

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evenings at Olney. But, thanks to my *Boudoir*, I can now hide myself from them. A poet's retreat is sacred. They acknowledge the truth of that proposition, and never presume to violate it.

The last sentence puts me in mind to tell you that I have ordered my volume to your door. My bookseller is the most dilatory of all his fraternity, or you would have received it long since. It is more than a month since I returned him the last proof, and consequently since the printing was finished. I sent him the manuscript at the beginning of last November, that he might publish while the town was full, and he will hit the exact moment when it is entirely empty. Patience, you will perceive, is in no situation exempted from the severest trials,—a remark that may serve to comfort you under the numberless trials of your own.

191.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

THUNDER STORM—FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE TRANSLATION OF HOMER.

July 27, 1785.

My dear William,—You and your party left me in a frame of mind that indisposed me much to company. I comforted myself with the hope that I should spend a silent day, in which I should find abundant leisure to indulge sensations which, though of the melancholy kind, I yet wished to nourish. But that hope proved vain. In less than an hour after your departure, Mr —— made his appearance at the greenhouse door. We were obliged to ask him to dinner, and he dined with us. He is an agreeable, sensible, well bred young man, but with all his recommendations, I felt that on that occasion I could have spared him. So much better are the absent, whom we love much, than the present whom we love a little. I have, however, made myself amends since, and nothing else having interfered, have sent many a thought after you.

You had been gone two days when a violent thunderstorm came over us. I was passing out of the parlour into the hall, with Mungo at my heels, when a flash seemed to fill the room with fire. In the same instant came the clap, so that the explosion was, I suppose, perpendicular to the roof. Mungo's courage upon the tremendous occasion, constrained me to smile, in spite of the solemn impression that such an event

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never fails to affect me with,—the moment that he heard the thunder, (which was like the burst of a great gun,) with a wrinkled forehead, and with eyes directed to the ceiling, whence the sound seemed to proceed, he barked; but he barked exactly in concert with the thunder. It thundered once, and he barked once; and so precisely the very instant when the thunder happened, that both sounds seemed to begin and end together. Some dogs will clap their tails close, and sneak into a corner, at such a time; but Mungo, it seems, is of a more fearless family. A house at no great distance from ours, was the mark to which the lightning was directed: it knocked down the chimney, split the building, and carried away the corner of the next house, in which lay a fellow drunk, and asleep upon his bed: it roused and terrified him, and he promises to get drunk no more; but I have seen a woful end of many such conversions. I remember but one such storm at Olney since I have known the place; and I am glad that it did not happen two days sooner, for the sake of the ladies, who would probably, one of them at least, have been alarmed by it. I have received, since you went, two very flattering letters of thanks, one from Mr Bacon, and one from Mr Barham, such as might make a lean poet plump, and a humble poet proud. But being myself neither lean nor humble, I know of no other effect they had, than that they pleased me; and I communicate the intelligence to you, not without an assured hope that you will be pleased also. We are now going to walk, and thus far I have written before I have received your letter. Friday—I must now be as compact as possible. When I began, I designed four sides, but my packet being transformed into two single epistles, I can consequently afford you but three. I have filled a large sheet with animadversions upon Pope. I am proceeding in my translation—*Velis et remis, omnibus nervis*, as Hudibras has it; and if God give me health and ability, will put it into your hands when I see you next. Mr ——— has just left us. He has read my book, and, as if fearful that I had overlooked some of them myself, has pointed out to me all its beauties. I do assure you, the man has a very acute discernment, and a taste that I have no fault to find with. I hope that you are of the same opinion.

Be not sorry that your love of Christ was excited in you by a picture. Could a dog or a cat suggest to me the thought that Christ is precious, I would not despise that thought because a dog or a cat suggested it. The meanness of the

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instrument cannot debase the nobleness of the principle. He that kneels before a picture of Christ, is an idolater. But he in whose heart the sight of a picture kindles a warm remembrance of the Saviour's sufferings, must be a Christian. Suppose that I dream as Gardiner * did, that Christ walks before me, that he turns and smiles upon me, and fills my soul with ineffable love and joy, — will a man tell me that I am deceived, that I ought not to love or rejoice in him for such a reason, because a dream is merely a picture drawn upon the imagination? I hold not with such divinity. To love Christ is the greatest dignity of man, be that affection wrought in him how it may.

Adieu! May the blessing of God be upon you all. It is your mother's heart's wish and mine. — Yours ever,

W. C.

192. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

COMFORT IN HIS PRESENT CONNECTIONS — SUCCESS OF THE TASK — DR JOHNSON'S JOURNAL, AND CHARACTER OF HIS RELIGION.

August 27, 1785.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — I was low in spirits yesterday, when your parcel came and raised them. Every proof of attention and regard to a man who lives in a vinegar bottle, is welcome from his friends on the outside of it; accordingly your books were welcome, (you must not forget, by the way, that I want the original, of which you have sent me the translation only,) and the ruffles from Miss Shuttleworth most welcome. I am covetous, if ever man was, of living in the remembrance of absentees, whom I highly value and esteem, and consequently felt myself much gratified by her very obliging present. I have had more comfort, far more comfort, in the connections that I have formed within the last twenty years, than in the more numerous ones that I had before.

Memorandum — The latter are almost all Unwins or Unwinisms.

You are entitled to my thanks also for the facetious engravings of John Gilpin. A serious poem is like a swan, — it flies heavily, and never far; but a jest has the wings of a swallow, that never tire, and that carry it into every nook and corner. I am perfectly a stranger, however, to the reception that my

* Colonel Gardiner, who fell in the skirmish with the rebels, at Prestonpans.

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volume meets with, and I believe, in respect of my *nonchalance* upon that subject, if authors would but copy so fair an example, am a most exemplary character. I must tell you, nevertheless, that although the laurels that I gain at Olney will never minister much to my pride, I have acquired some. The Rev. Mr S—— is my admirer, and thinks my second volume superior to my first. It ought to be so. If we do not improve by practice, then nothing can mend us; and a man has no more cause to be mortified at being told that he has excelled himself, than the elephant had, whose praise it was, that he was the greatest elephant in the world, himself excepted. If it be fair to judge of a book by an extract, I do not wonder that you were so little edified by Johnson's Journal. It is even more ridiculous than was poor ——'s of flatulent memory. The portion of it given to us in this day's paper, contains not one sentiment worth one farthing; except the last, in which he resolves to bind himself with no more unbidden obligations. Poor man! one would think, that to pray for his dead wife, and to pinch himself with church fasts, had been almost the whole of his religion. I am sorry that he, who was so manly an advocate for the cause of virtue in all other places, was so childishly employed, and so superstitiously too, in his closet. Had he studied his Bible more, to which, by his own confession, he was in great part a stranger, he had known better what use to make of his retired hours, and had trifled less. His lucubrations of this sort have rather the appearance of religious dotage, than of any vigorous exertions towards God. It will be well if the publication prove not hurtful in its effects, by exposing the best cause, already too much despised, to ridicule still more profane. On the other side of the same paper, I find a long string of aphorisms, and maxims, and rules for the conduct of life, which, though they appear not with his name, are so much in his manner, with the above mentioned, that I suspect them for his. I have not read them all, but several of them I read that were trivial enough: for the sake of one, however, I forgive him the rest,—he advises never to banish hope entirely, because it is the cordial of life, although it be the greatest flatterer in the world. Such a measure of hope as may not endanger my peace by disappointment, I would wish to cherish upon every subject in which I am interested. But there lies the difficulty. A cure, however, and the only one, for all the irregularities both of hope and fear, is found in submission to the will of God. Happy they that have it!

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This last sentence puts me in mind of your reference to Blair in a former letter, whom you there permitted to be your arbiter, to adjust the respective claims of *who* or *that*. I do not rashly differ from so great a grammarian, nor do at any rate differ from him altogether: upon solemn occasions, as in prayer or preaching for instance, I would be strictly correct, and upon stately ones, for instance were I writing an epic poem, I would be so likewise, but not upon familiar occasions. God *who* heareth prayer, is right. Hector *who* saw Patroclus, is right. And the man *that* dresses me every day, is in my mind right also; because the contrary would give an air of stiffness and pedantry to an expression, that in respect of the matter of it cannot be too negligently made up.*

Adieu, my dear William. I have scribbled with all my might, which, breakfast time excepted, has been my employment ever since I rose, and it is now past one.—Yours,

W. C.

193.—TO LADY HESKETH.

PLEASURE IN RENEWING THEIR CORRESPONDENCE—PAST COURSE OF LIFE.

October 12, 1785.

My dear Cousin,—It is no new thing with you to give pleasure. But I will venture to say, that you do not often give more than you gave me this morning. When I came down to breakfast, and found upon the table a letter franked by my uncle, and when opening that frank, I found that it contained a letter from you, I said within myself—"This is just as it should be. We are all grown young again, and the days that I thought I should see no more, are actually returned." You perceive, therefore, that you judged well when you conjectured that a line from you would not be disagreeable to me. It could not be otherwise than, as in fact it proved, a most agreeable surprise, for I can truly boast of an affection for you, that neither years, nor interrupted intercourse, have at all abated. I need only recollect how much I valued you once, and with how much cause, immediately to feel a revival of the same value: if that can be said to revive, which at the most has only been dormant for want of

* The authority of Addison is against both Blair and Cowper. The *Spectator* uses *that* as a relative, upon all occasions, and as if through a peculiar predilection for the word. Cowper's, however, is the best practice.

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employment. But I slander it when I say that it has slept. A thousand times have I recollected a thousand scenes, in which our two selves have formed the whole of the drama, with the greatest pleasure; at times, too, when I had no reason to suppose that I should ever hear from you again. I have laughed with you at the Arabian Nights' Entertainment, which afforded us, as you well know, a fund of merriment that deserves never to be forgot. I have walked with you to Netley Abbey, and have scrambled with you over hedges in every direction, and many other feats we have performed together, upon the field of my remembrance, and all within these few years. Should I say within this twelvemonth, I should not transgress the truth. The hours that I have spent with you were among the pleasantest of my former days, and are therefore chronicled in my mind so deeply as to fear no erasure. Neither do I forget my poor friend Sir Thomas. I should remember him indeed, at any rate, on account of his personal kindness to myself; but the last testimony that he gave of his regard for you, endears him to me still more. With his uncommon understanding, (for with many peculiarities he had more sense than any of his acquaintance,) and with his generous sensibilities, it was hardly possible that he should not distinguish you as he has done. As it was the last, so it was the best proof that he could give of a judgment that never deceived him, when he would allow himself leisure to consult it.

You say that you have often heard of me; that puzzles me. I cannot imagine from what quarter: but it is no matter. I must tell you, however, my cousin, that your information has been a little defective. That I am happy in my situation is true; I live, and have lived these twenty years, with Mrs Unwin, to whose affectionate care of me, during the far greater part of that time, it is, under Providence, owing that I live at all. But I do not account myself happy in having been for thirteen of those years in a state of mind that has made all that care and attention necessary; an attention and a care that have injured her health, and which, had she not been uncommonly supported, must have brought her to the grave. But I will pass to another subject; it would be cruel to particularize only to give pain, neither would I by any means give a sable hue to the first letter of a correspondence so unexpectedly renewed.

I am delighted with what you tell me of my uncle's good health. To enjoy any measure of cheerfulness at so late

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a day is much. But to have that late day enlivened with the vivacity of youth, is much more, and in these post-diluvian times a rarity indeed. Happy for the most part are parents who have daughters. Daughters are not apt to outlive their natural affections, which a son has generally survived even before his boyish years are expired. I rejoice particularly in my uncle's felicity, who has three female descendants from his little person, who leave him nothing to wish for upon that head.

My dear cousin, dejection of spirits, which, I suppose, may have prevented many a man from becoming an author, made me one. I find constant employment necessary, and therefore take care to be constantly employed. Manual occupations do not engage the mind sufficiently, as I know by experience, having tried many. But composition, especially of verse, absorbs it wholly. I write, therefore, generally three hours in a morning, and in an evening I transcribe. I read also, but less than I write, for I must have bodily exercise, and therefore never pass a day without it.

You ask me where I have been this summer. I answer, at Olney. Should you ask me where I spent the last seventeen summers, I should still answer, at Olney. Ay, and the winters also; I have seldom left it, and except when I attended my brother in his last illness, never, I believe, a fortnight together.

Adieu, my beloved cousin, I shall not always be thus nimble in reply, but shall always have great pleasure in answering you when I can. — Yours, my dear friend and cousin, W. C.

194. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

PROGRESS OF HIS TRANSLATION — COURSE OF GREEK RECOMMENDED FOR A BOY.

October 22, 1785.

My dear William, — You might well suppose that your letter had miscarried, though in fact it was duly received. I am not often so long in arrear, and you may assure yourself that when at any time it happens that I am so, neither neglect nor idleness is the cause. I have, as you well know, a daily occupation, forty lines to translate, a task which I never excuse myself when it is possible to perform it. Equally sedulous I am in the matter of transcribing, so that between

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both, my morning and evening are for the most part completely engaged. Add to this, that though my spirits are seldom so bad but I can write verse, they are often at so low an ebb, as to make the production of a letter impossible. So much for a trespass which called for some apology, but for which to apologize farther, would be a greater trespass still.

I am now in the twentieth book of Homer, and shall assuredly proceed, because the farther I go the more I find myself justified in the undertaking; and in due time, if I live, shall assuredly publish. In the whole I shall have composed about forty thousand verses, about which forty thousand verses I shall have taken great pains, on no occasion suffering a slovenly line to escape me. I leave you to guess therefore, whether, such a labour once achieved, I shall not determine to turn it to some account, and to gain myself profit if I can, if not, at least some credit, for my reward.

I perfectly approve of your course with John. The most entertaining books are best to begin with, and none in the world, so far as entertainment is concerned, deserves the preference to Homer. Neither do I know that there is any where to be found Greek of easier construction: poetical Greek I mean; and as for prose, I should recommend Xenophon's Cyropædia. That also is a most amusing narrative, and ten times easier to understand than the crabbed epigrams and scribblements of the minor poets, that are generally put into the hands of boys. I took particular notice of the neatness of John's Greek character, which, let me tell you, deserves its share of commendation; for to write the language legibly is not the lot of every man who can read it. Witness myself for one.

I like the little ode of Huntingford's that you sent me. In such matters we do not expect much novelty, or much depth of thought. The expression is all in all, which to me at least appears to be faultless.

Adieu, my dear William. We are well, and you and yours are ever the objects of our affection. W. C.

195.—TO LADY HESKETH.

ACCOUNT OF HIS CIRCUMSTANCES—THANKS FOR OFFERS OF ASSISTANCE—HIS PERSONAL APPEARANCE.

OLNEY, *November* 9, 1784.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Whose last most affectionate letter has run in my head ever since I received it, and which I now sit

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down to answer two days sooner than the post will serve me. I thank you for it, and with a warmth for which I am sure you will give me credit, though I do not spend many words in describing it. I do not seek *new* friends, not being altogether sure that I should find them, but have unspeakable pleasure in being still beloved by an old one. I hope that now our correspondence has suffered its last interruption; and that we shall go down together to the grave, chatting and chirping as merrily as such a scene of things as this will permit.

I am happy that my poems have pleased you. My volume has afforded me no such pleasure at any time, either while I was writing it, or since its publication, as I have derived from yours and my uncle's opinion of it. I make certain allowances for partiality, and for that peculiar quickness of taste, with which you both relish what you like, and, after all drawbacks upon those accounts duly made, find myself rich in the measure of your approbation that still remains. But above all, I honour John Gilpin, since it was he who first encouraged you to write. I made him on purpose to laugh at, and he served his purpose well; but I am now in debt to him for a more valuable acquisition than all the laughter in the world amounts to,—the recovery of my intercourse with you, which is to me inestimable.

My benevolent and generous cousin, when I was once asked if I wanted any thing, and given delicately to understand that the inquirer was ready to supply all my occasions, I thankfully and civilly, but positively, declined the favour. I neither suffer, nor have suffered any such inconveniences as I had not much rather endure, than come under obligations of that sort to a person comparatively with yourself a stranger to me. But to you I answer otherwise. I know you thoroughly, and the liberality of your disposition; and have that consummate confidence in the sincerity of your wish to serve me, that delivers me from all awkward constraint, and from all fear of trespassing by acceptance. To you therefore I reply, yes. Whensoever, and whatsoever, and in what manner soever you please; and add moreover, that my affection for the giver is such, as will increase to me tenfold the satisfaction that I shall have in receiving. It is necessary, however, that I should let you a little into the state of my finances, that you may not suppose them more narrowly circumscribed than they are. Since Mrs Unwin and I have lived at Olney, we have had but one purse, although during the whole of that time, till lately, her income

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was nearly double mine. Her revenues indeed are now in some measure reduced, and do not much exceed my own; the worst consequence of this is, that we are forced to deny ourselves some things which hitherto we have been better able to afford, but they are such things as neither life, nor the well-being of life, depend upon. My own income has been better than it is, but when it was best, it would not have enabled me to live as my connections demanded that I should, had it not been combined with a better than itself, at least at this end of the kingdom. Of this I had full proof during three months that I spent in lodgings at Huntingdon, in which time, by the help of good management, and a clear notion of economical matters, I contrived to spend the income of a twelvemonth. Now, my beloved cousin, you are in possession of the whole case as it stands. Strain no points to your own inconvenience or hurt, for there is no need of it, but indulge yourself in communicating (no matter what) that you can spare without missing it, since by so doing you will be sure to add to the comforts of my life one of the sweetest that I can enjoy,—a token and proof of your affection.

In the affair of my next publication, toward which you also offer me so kindly your assistance, there will be no need that you should help me in the manner that you propose. It will be a large work, consisting, I should imagine, of six volumes at least. The twelfth of this month I shall have spent a year upon it, and it will cost me more than another. I do not love the booksellers well enough to make them a present of such a labour, but intend to publish by subscription. Your vote and interest, my dear cousin, upon the occasion, if you please—but nothing more. I will trouble you with some papers of proposals, when the time shall come, and am sure that you will circulate as many for me as you can. Now, my dear, I am going to tell you a secret. It is a great secret, that you must not whisper even to your cat. No creature is at this moment apprised of it but Mrs Unwin and her son. I am making a new translation of Homer, and am on the point of finishing the twenty-first book of the Iliad. The reasons upon which I undertake this Herculean labour, and by which I justify an enterprise in which I seem so effectually anticipated by Pope, although in fact he has not anticipated me at all, I may possibly give you, if you wish for them, when I can find nothing more interesting to say,—a period which I do not conceive to be very near! I have not answered many things in your letter, nor can do it at present

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for want of room. I cannot believe but that I should know you, notwithstanding all that time may have done. There is not a feature of your face, could I meet it upon the road by itself, that I should not instantly recollect. I should say, that is my cousin's nose, or those are her lips and her chin, and no woman upon earth can claim them but herself. As for me, I am a very smart youth of my years. I am not indeed grown gray so much as I am grown bald. No matter. There was more hair in the world than ever had the honour to belong to me. Accordingly having found just enough to curl a little at my ears, and to intermix with a little of my own that still hangs behind, I appear, if you see me in an afternoon, to have a very decent head-dress, not easily distinguished from my natural growth; which being worn with a small bag, and a black ribbon about my neck, continues to me the charms of my youth, even on the verge of age. Away with the fear of writing too often.—Yours, my dearest cousin, W. C.

P.S. That the view I give you of myself may be complete, I add the two following items,—that I am in debt to nobody, and that I grow fat.

196.—TO LADY HESKETH.

DISINTERESTEDNESS OF HIS FRIENDSHIP—SECRET OF HIS TRANSLATION.

My dearest Cousin,—I am glad that I always loved you as I did. It releases me from any occasion to suspect that my present affection for you is indebted for its existence to any selfish considerations. No, I am sure I love you disinterestedly, and for your own sake, because I never thought of you, with any other sensations than those of the truest affection, even while I was under the persuasion that I should never hear from you again. But with my present feelings, superadded to those that I always had for you, I find it no easy matter to do justice to my sensations. I perceive myself in a state of mind similar to that of the traveller, described in Pope's Messiah, who, as he passes through a sandy desert, starts at the sudden and unexpected sound of a waterfall. You have placed me in a situation new to me, and in which I feel myself somewhat puzzled how to behave. At the same time that I would not grieve you, by putting a check upon your bounty, I would be as careful not to abuse

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it, as if I were a miser, and the question not about your money, but my own.

Although I do not suspect that a secret to you, my cousin, is any burden, yet having maturely considered that point, since I wrote my last, I feel myself altogether disposed to release you from the injunction, to that effect, under which I laid you. I have now made such a progress in my translation, that I need neither fear that I shall stop short of the end, nor that any other rider of Pegasus should overtake me. Therefore if at any time it should fall fairly in your way, or you should feel yourself invited to say I am so occupied, you have my poetship's free permission. Dr Johnson read, and recommended my first volume. W. C.

197.—TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

EXCELLENCE OF A "CHARGE" BY BISHOP BAGOT.

November 9, 1785.

My dear Friend,—You desired me to return your good brother the bishop's Charge as soon as I conveniently could, and the weather having forbidden us to hope for the pleasure of seeing you, and Mrs Bagot with you, this morning, I return it now, lest, as you told me that your stay in this country would be short, you should be gone before it could reach you.

I wish, as you do, that the Charge in question could find its way into all the parsonages in the nation. It is so generally applicable, and yet so pointedly enforced, that it deserves the most extensive spread. I find in it the happiest mixture of spiritual authority, the meekness of a Christian, and the good manners of a gentleman. It has convinced me, that the poet, who, like myself, shall take the liberty to pay the author of such valuable admonition a compliment, shall do at least as much honour to himself as to his subject.—Yours,

W. C.

198.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

RESOLUTION TO PUBLISH HOMER BY SUBSCRIPTION.

December 24, 1785.

My dear Friend,—You would have found a letter from me at Mr ———'s, according to your assignation, had not the

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post, setting out two hours sooner than the usual time, prevented me. The Odyssey that you sent has but one fault—at least, but one that I have discovered, which is, that I cannot read it. The very attempt, if persevered in, would soon make me as blind as Homer was himself. I am now in the last book of the Iliad; shall be obliged to you therefore for a more legible one by the first opportunity.

I wrote to Johnson lately, desiring him to give me advice and information on the subject of proposals for a subscription; and he desired me in his answer not to use that mode of publication, but to treat with him; adding, that he could make me such offers, as, he believed, I should approve. I have replied to his letter, but abide by my first purpose.

Having occasion to write to Mr [Thornton] concerning his princely benevolence, extended this year also, to the poor of Olney, I put in a good word for my poor self likewise, and have received a very obliging and encouraging answer. He promises me six names in particular, that, he says, will do me no discredit, and expresses a wish to be served with papers as soon as they shall be printed.

I meet with encouragement from all quarters, such as I find need of indeed, in an enterprise of such length and moment, but such as at the same time I find effectual. Homer is not a poet to be translated under the disadvantage of doubts and dejection.

Let me sing the praises of the desk which ——— has sent me. In general, it is as elegant as possible. In particular, it is of cedar, beautifully lacquered. When put together, it assumes the form of a handsome small chest, and contains all sorts of accommodations; it is inlaid with ivory, and serves the purpose of a reading desk.—Your affectionate

W. C.

199.—TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

REASONS FOR UNDERTAKING THE TRANSLATION OF HOMER.

December 24, 1785.

My dear Friend,—Till I had made such a progress in my present undertaking, as to put it out of all doubt that, if I lived, I should proceed in and finish it, I kept the matter to myself. It would have done me little honour to have told my friends that I had an arduous enterprise in hand, if afterwards I must have told them that I had dropped it. Knowing

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it to have been universally the opinion of the literati, ever since they have allowed themselves to consider the matter coolly, that a translation, properly so called, of Homer, is, notwithstanding what Pope has done, a desideratum in the English language, it struck me, that an attempt to supply the deficiency would be an honourable one; and having made myself, in former years, somewhat critically a master of the original, I was by this double consideration induced to make the attempt myself. I am now translating into blank verse the last book of the Iliad, and mean to publish by subscription.

W. C.

200.—TO GEORGE COLMAN, ESQ.*

COWPER'S FORMER FRIENDSHIP FOR COLMAN UNABATED — SOLICITS HIS INTEREST IN FAVOUR OF THE TRANSLATION OF HOMER.

OLNEY, *December* 27, 1785.

DEAR COLMAN,—For though we have not had any intercourse for more than twenty years, I cannot find in my heart to address you by any other style; and I am the rather encouraged to the use of that in which I formerly addressed you, by a piece of intelligence that I received not long since from my friend Hill, who told me that you had inquired after me of him, and had said something about an intention to write to me. I took pretty good care that you should not be ignorant of my having commenced author, by sending you my volume. The reason why I did not send you my second was, because you omitted to send me your Art of Poetry, which, in a splenetic mood, I suppose, I construed into prohibition. But Hill's subsequent information has cured me of that malady so far as you are concerned.

Once an author and always an author: this you know, my friend, is always an axiom, and admits of no dispute. In my instance, at least, it is likely to hold good, for I have more leisure than it is possible to dispose of without writing. Accordingly I write every day, and have every day been writing since I last published, till at last I have made such a progress in a new translation of Homer into blank verse, that I am upon the point of publishing again. Hitherto I have given away my copies; but, having indulged myself in that frolic twice, I now mean to try whether it may not prove equally agreeable to get something by the bargain. I come

* This letter to George Colman the Elder is here inserted for the first time in a collection of Cowper's Letters. It was first published among the "Posthumous Letters from various celebrated men, addressed to Francis Colman, and George Colman the Elder."

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therefore humbly to solicit your vote and interest, and to beg that you will help me in the circulation of my proposals; for I shall print by subscription. On such occasions, you know, a man sets every wheel in motion, and it would be strange indeed, if, not having a great many wheels to move, I should leave unattempted so important a one as yourself. As soon as I have your permission, I shall order my bookseller to send you some papers.

The News informed me of your illness, which gave me true concern, for time alone can efface the traces of such a friendship as I have felt for you—no, nor even time, with distance to help it. The News also told me that you were better; but to find that you are perfectly recovered, and to see it under your own hand, will give the greatest pleasure to one who can honestly subscribe himself to this day, your very affectionate WILLIAM COWPER.

I enclose this with a letter to Johnson, my publisher, to whom I am obliged to have recourse for your address.

201.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

PROGRESS IN TRANSLATING—SUBSCRIPTIONS—POOR OF OLNEY.

December 31, 1785.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—You have learned from my last that I am now conducting myself upon the plan that you recommended to me in the summer. But since I wrote it, I have made still farther advances in my negotiation with Johnson. The proposals are adjusted. The proof-sheet has been printed off, corrected, and returned. They will be sent abroad as soon as I make up a complete list of the personages and persons to whom I would have them sent; which in a few days I hope to be able to accomplish. Johnson behaves very well, at least, according to my conception of the matter, and seems sensible that I have dealt liberally with him. He wishes me to be a gainer by my labours, in his own words, "to put something handsome into my pocket," and recommends two large quartos for the whole. He would not, he says, by any means advise an extravagant price, and has fixed it at three guineas; the half, as usual, to be paid at the time of subscribing, the remainder on delivery. Five hundred names, he adds, at this price, will put above a thousand pounds into my purse. I am doing my best to obtain them. Mr Newton is warm in my service, and can do not a little. I have of

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course written to Mr Bagot; who, when he was here, with much earnestness and affection entreated me so to do, as soon as I could have settled the conditions. If I could get Sir Richard Sutton's address, I would write to him also, though I have been but once in his company since I left Westminster, where he and I read the Iliad and Odyssey through together. I enclose Lord Dartmouth's answer to my application, which I will get you to shew to Lady Hesketh, because it will please her. I shall be glad if you can make an opportunity to call on her, during your present stay in town. You observe, therefore, that I am not wanting to myself. He that is so, has no just claim on the assistance of others, neither shall myself have cause to complain of me in other respects. I thank you for your friendly hints, and precautions, and shall not fail to give them the guidance of my pen. I respect the public, and I respect myself, and had rather want bread than expose myself wantonly to the condemnation of either. I hate the affectation so frequently found in authors, of negligence and slovenly slightness; and in the present case am sensible how necessary it is to shun them, when I undertake the vast and invidious labour of doing better than Pope has done before me. I thank you for all that you have said and done in my cause, and beforehand, for all that you shall say and do hereafter. I am sure that there will be no deficiency on your part. In particular, I thank you for taking such jealous care of my honour and respectability, when the man you mention applied for samples of my translation. When I deal in wine, cloth, or cheese, I will give samples, but of verse never. No consideration would have induced me to comply with the gentleman's demand, unless he could have assured me that his wife had longed.

I have frequently thought with pleasure of the summer that you have had in your heart, while you have been employed in softening the severity of winter in behalf of so many who must otherwise have been exposed to it. I wish that you could make a general jail-delivery, leaving only those behind who cannot elsewhere be so properly disposed of. You never said a better thing in your life, than when you assured Mr [Thornton] of the expediency of a gift of bedding to the poor of Olney. There is no one article of this world's comforts, with which, as Falstaff says, they are so heinously unprovided. When a poor woman, and an honest one, whom we know well, carried home two pair of blankets, a pair for herself and husband, and a pair for her six children; as soon

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as the children saw them, they jumped out of their straw, caught them in their arms, kissed them, blessed them, and danced for joy. An old woman, a very old one, the first night that she found herself so comfortably covered, could not sleep a wink, being kept awake by the contrary emotions, of transport on the one hand, and the fear of not being thankful enough on the other.

It just occurs to me to say, that this manuscript of mine will be ready for the press, as I hope, by the end of February. I shall have finished the Iliad in about ten days, and shall proceed immediately to the revisal of the whole. You must, if possible, come down to Olney, if it be only that you may take charge of its safe delivery to Johnson. For if by any accident it should be lost, I am undone — the first copy being but a lean counterpart of the second.

Your mother joins with me in love and good wishes of every kind, to you, and all yours. — Adieu, W. C.

202. — TO LADY HESKETH.

INEQUALITIES IN THE TASK — CAUSES OF THIS — HOMER.

January 10, 1786.

It gave me great pleasure that you found my friend Unwin, what I was sure you would find him, a most agreeable man. I did not usher him in with the marrow-bones and cleavers of high sounding panegyric, both because I was certain that whatsoever merit he had, your discernment would mark it, and because it is possible to do a man material injury by making his praise his harbinger. It is easy to raise expectation to such a pitch, that the reality, be it ever so excellent, must necessarily fall below it.

I hold myself much indebted to Mr ———, of whom I have the first information from yourself, both for his friendly disposition towards me, and for the manner in which he marks the defects in my volume. An author must be tender indeed, to wince on being touched so gently. It is undoubtedly as he says, and as you and my uncle say. You cannot be all mistaken, neither is it at all probable that any of you should be so. I take it for granted, therefore, that there are inequalities in the composition, and I do assure you, my dear, most faithfully, that if it should reach a second edition, I will spare no pains to improve it. It may serve me for an agreeable amusement perhaps, when Homer shall be gone

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and done with. The first edition of poems has generally been susceptible of improvement. Pope, I believe, never published one in his life that did not undergo variations; and his longest pieces many. I will only observe, that inequalities there must be always, and in every work of length. There are level parts of every subject, parts which we cannot with propriety attempt to elevate. They are by nature humble, and can only be made to assume an awkward and uncouth appearance by being mounted. But again I take it for granted that this remark does not apply to the matter of your objection. You were sufficiently aware of it before, and have no need that I should suggest it as an apology, could it have served that office, but would have made it for me yourself. In truth, my dear, had you known in what anguish of mind I wrote the whole of that poem, and under what perpetual interruptions from a cause that has since been removed, so that sometimes I had not an opportunity of writing more than three lines at a sitting, you would long since have wondered as much as I do myself, that it turned out any thing better than Grub Street.

My cousin, give yourself no trouble to find out any of the Magi to scrutinize my Homer. I can do without them; and if I were not conscious that I have no need of their help, I would be the first to call for it. Assure yourself that I intend to be careful to the utmost line of all possible caution, both with respect to language and versification. I will not send a verse to the press, that shall not have undergone the strictest examination.

A subscription is surely on every account the most eligible mode of publication. When I shall have emptied the purses of my friends, and of their friends, into my own, I am still free to levy contributions upon the world at large, and I shall then have a fund to defray the expenses of a new edition. I have ordered Johnson to print the proposals immediately, and hope that they will kiss your hands before the week is expired.

I have had the kindest letter from Josephus* that I ever had. He mentioned my purpose to one of the Masters of Eton, who replied, that "such a work is much wanted."—Affectionately yours, W. C.

* Joseph Hill, Esq.

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203. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

A VISIT TO LADY HESKETH — WHY THE ILIAD CONCLUDES WITH THE DEATH OF HECTOR.

January 14, 1786.

My dear William,— I am glad that you have seen Lady Hesketh. I knew that you would find her every thing that is amiable and elegant. Else, being my relation, I would never have shewn her to you. She also was delighted with her visiter, and expects the greatest pleasure in seeing you again; but is under some apprehensions that a tender regard for the drum of your ear may keep you from her. Never mind! you have two drums, and if she should crack both, I will buy you a trumpet.

General Cowper having much pressed me to accompany my proposals with a specimen, I have sent him one. It is taken from the twenty-fourth book of the Iliad, and is part of the interview between Priam and Achilles. Tell me, if it be possible for any man to tell me, why did Homer leave off at the burial of Hector? Is it possible that he could be determined to it by a conceit so little worthy of him, as that, having made the number of his books completely the alphabetical number, he would not for the joke's sake proceed any farther? Why did he not give us the death of Achilles, and the destruction of Troy? Tell me also, if the critics, with Aristotle at their head, have not found that he left off exactly where he should; and that every epic poem, to all generations, is bound to conclude with the burial of Hector? I do not in the least doubt it. Therefore, if I live to write a dozen epic poems, I will always take care to bury Hector, and to bring all matters at that point to an immediate conclusion.

I had a truly kind letter from Mr ———, * written immediately on his recovery from the fever. I am bound to honour James's powder, not only for the services it has often rendered to myself, but still more for having been the means of preserving a life ten times more valuable to society than mine is ever likely to be.

You say, "Why should I trouble you with my troubles?" I answer, "Why not? What is a friend good for, if we may

* Thornton.

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not lay one end of the sack upon his shoulders, while we ourselves carry the other?"

You see your duty to God, and your duty to your neighbour, and you practise both with your best ability. Yet a certain person accounts you blind. I would that all the world were so blind even as you are. But there are some in it who, like the Chinese, say, "We have two eyes, and other nations have but one!" I am glad, however, that in your one eye you have sight enough to discover that such censures are not worth minding.

I thank you heartily for every step you take in the advancement of my present purpose.

Contrive to pay Lady H. a long visit, for she has a thousand things to say.—Yours, my dear William, W. C.

204.—TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

PROGRESS WITH HOMER.

January 15, 1786.

My dear Friend,—I have just time to give you a hasty line to explain to you the delay that the publication of my proposals has unexpectedly encountered, and at which I suppose that you have been somewhat surprised.

I have a near relation in London, and a warm friend in General Cowper; he is also a person as able as willing to render me material service. I lately made him acquainted with my design of sending into the world a new translation of Homer, and told him that my papers would soon attend him. He soon after desired that I would annex to them a specimen of the work. To this I at first objected, for reasons that need not be enumerated here; but at last acceded to his advice; and accordingly the day before yesterday I sent him a specimen. It consists of one hundred and seven lines, and is taken from the interview between Priam and Achilles in the last book. I chose to extract from the latter end of the poem, and as near to the close of it as possible, that I might encourage a hope in the readers of it, that if they found it in some degree worthy of their approbation, they would find the former parts of the work not less so. For if a writer flags anywhere, it must be when he is near the end.

My subscribers will have an option given them in the proposals respecting the price. My predecessor in the same business was not quite so moderate. * * * * * You may say

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perhaps, (at least if your kindness for me did not prevent it, you would be ready to say) "It is well; but do you place yourself on a level with Pope?" I answer, or rather *should* answer, "By no means — not as a poet, but as a translator of Homer; if I did not expect and believe that I should even surpass him, why have I meddled with this matter at all? If I confess inferiority, I reprobate my own undertaking."

When I can hear of the rest of the bishops, that they preach and live as your brother does, I will think more respectfully of them than I feel inclined to do at present. They may be learned, and I know that some of them are; but your brother, learned as he is, has other more powerful recommendations. Persuade him to publish his poetry, and I promise you that he shall find as warm and sincere an admirer in me as in any man that lives. — Yours, my dear friend, very affectionately, W. C.

155. — TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

DR MATY'S OPINION OF THE TASK — NO GOOD ENGLISH VERSION OF HOMER.

January 23, 1786.

MY DEAR AND FAITHFUL FRIEND, — * * *

* * * * * * * * *

The paragraph that I am now beginning will contain information of a kind that I am not very fond of communicating, and on a subject that I am not very fond of writing about. Only to you I will open my budget without reserve, because I know that in what concerns my authorship you take an interest that demands my confidence, and will be pleased with every occurrence that is at all propitious to my endeavours. Lady Hesketh, who, had she as many mouths as Virgil's Fame, with a tongue in each, would employ them all in my service, writes me word that Dr Maty* of the Museum has read my Task. I cannot even to you relate what he says of it; though, when I began this story, I thought I had courage enough to tell it boldly. He designs, however, to give his opinion of it in his next Monthly Review; and being i formed that I was

* There were two Dr Matys, father and son, natives of Holland, both authors, and librarians to the British Museum. Cowper's commentator must have been Dr Paul Henry Maty, the son, who was for many years editor of the *New Monthly Review*, and died in 1787.

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about to finish a translation of Homer, asked her Ladyship's leave to mention the circumstance on that occasion. This incident pleases me the more, because I have authentic intelligence of his being a critical character in all its forms, acute, sour, and blunt; and so incorruptible withal, and so unsusceptible of bias from undue motives, that, as my correspondent informs me, he would not praise his own mother, did he not think she deserved it.

The said Task is likewise gone to Oxford, conveyed thither by an intimate friend of Dr ———, with a purpose of putting it into his hands. My friend, what will they do with me at Oxford? Will they burn me at Carfax, or will they anathematize me with bell, book, and candle? I can say with more truth than Ovid did, *Parve, nec invideo.*

The said Dr ——— has been heard to say, and I give you his own words, (stop both your ears while I utter them,) "that Homer has never been translated, and that Pope was a fool." Very irreverent language to be sure, but in consideration of the subject on which he used them, we will pardon it, even in a dean. One of the masters of Eton told a friend of mine lately, that a translation of Homer is much wanted. So now you have all my news. * * *

Yours, my dear friend, cordially, W. C.

206. — TO LADY HESKETH.

THANKS FOR AN ANONYMOUS PRESENT — DETAILS ON HOMER — GENERAL COWPER.

OLNEY, *January* 31, 1786.

It is very pleasant, my dearest cousin, to receive a present so delicately conveyed as that which I received so lately from Anonymous; but it is also very painful to have nobody to thank for it. I find myself therefore driven by stress of necessity to the following resolution, namely, that I will constitute you my thanks-receiver-general for whatsoever gift I shall receive hereafter, as well as for those that I have already received from a nameless benefactor. I therefore thank you, my cousin, for a most elegant present, including the most elegant compliment that ever poet was honoured with; for a snuff-box of tortoise-shell, with a beautiful landscape on the lid of it, glazed with crystal, having the figures of three hares in the foreground, and inscribed above with these words, *The Peasant's Nest*—

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and below with these — *Tiney, Puss, and Bess.* For all and every of these I thank you, and also for standing proxy on this occasion. Nor must I forget to thank you, that so soon after I had sent you the first letter of Anonymous, I received another in the same hand. There! Now I am a little easier.

I have almost conceived a design to send up half a dozen stout country fellows, to tie by the leg to their respective bedposts the company that so abridges your opportunity of writing to me. Your letters are the joy of my heart, and I cannot endure to be robbed, by I know not whom, of half my treasure. But there is no comfort without a drawback, and therefore it is that I, who have unknown friends, have unknown enemies also. Ever since I wrote last I find myself in better health, and my nocturnal spasms and fever considerably abated. I intend to write to Dr Kerr on Thursday, that I may gratify him with an account of my amendment; for to him I know that it will be a gratification. Were he not a physician, I should regret that he lives so distant, for he is a most agreeable man; but being what he is, it would be impossible to have his company, even if he were a neighbour, unless in time of sickness; at which time, whatever charms he might have himself, my own must necessarily lose much of their effect on him.

When I write to you, my dear, what I have already related to the General, I am always fearful lest I should tell you that for news with which you are well acquainted. For once, however, I will venture. On Wednesday last I received from Johnson the MS. copy of a specimen that I had sent to the General; and, enclosed in the same cover, notes upon it by an unknown critic. Johnson, in a short letter, recommended him to me as a man of unquestionable learning and ability. On perusal and consideration of his remarks, I found him such; and having nothing so much at heart as to give all possible security to yourself and the General, that my work shall not come forth unfinished, I answered Johnson, that I would gladly submit my MS. to his friend. He is in truth a very clever fellow, perfectly a stranger to me, and one who I promise you will not spare for severity of animadversion, where he shall find occasion. It is impossible for you, my dearest cousin, to express a wish that I do not equally feel a wish to gratify. You are desirous that Maty should see a book of my Homer, and for that reason if Maty *will* see a book of it, he shall be welcome, although time is likely to be

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precious, and consequently any delay, that is not absolutely necessary, as much as possible to be avoided. I am now revising the Iliad. It is a business that will cost me four months, perhaps five; for I compare the very words as I go, and if much alteration should occur, must transcribe the whole. The first book I have almost transcribed already. To these five months, Johnson says that nine more must be added for printing, and upon my own experience I will venture to assure you, that the tardiness of printers will make those nine months twelve. There is danger, therefore, that my subscribers may think that I make them wait too long, and that they who know me not, may suspect a bubble. How glad shall I be to read it over in an evening, book by book, as fast as I settle the copy, to you, and to Mrs Unwin! She has been my touchstone always, and without reference to her taste and judgment I have printed nothing. With one of you at each elbow I should think myself the happiest of all poets.

The General and I, having broken the ice, are upon the comfortable terms of correspondence. He writes very affectionately to me, and I say every thing to him that comes uppermost. I could not write frequently to any creature living, upon any other terms than those. He tells me of infirmities that he has, which make him less active than he was. I am sorry to hear that he has any such. Alas! alas! he was young when I saw him, only twenty years ago.

I have the most affectionate letter imaginable from Colman, who writes to me like a brother. The Chancellor is yet dumb.

May God have you in his keeping, my beloved cousin! Farewell, W. C.

207—TO LADY HESKETH.

INVITATION TO OLNEY — DESCRIPTION OF THE POET'S RESIDENCE.

OLNEY, *February* 9, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN, — I have been impatient to tell you that I am impatient to see you again. Mrs Unwin partakes with me in all my feelings upon this subject, and longs also to see you. I should have told you so by the last post, but have been so completely occupied by this tormenting specimen, that it was impossible to do it. I sent the General a letter on Monday, that would distress and alarm him; I sent him another yesterday, that will I hope quiet him again. Johnson

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has apologized very civilly for the multitude of his friend's strictures; and his friend has promised to confine himself in future to a comparison of me with the original, so that, I doubt not, we shall jog on merrily together. And now, my dear, let me tell you once more, that your kindness in promising us a visit has charmed us both. I shall see you again. I shall hear your voice. We shall take walks together. I will shew you my prospects, the hovel, the alcove, the Ouse, and its banks, every thing that I have described. I anticipate the pleasure of those days not very far distant, and I feel a part of it at this moment. Talk not of an inn! Mention it not for your life! We have never had so many visiters, but we could easily accommodate them all; though we have received Unwin, and his wife, and his sister, and his son, all at once. My dear, I will not let you come till the end of May, or beginning of June, because before that time my greenhouse will not be ready to receive us, and it is the only pleasant room belonging to us. When the plants go out, we go in. I line it with mats, and spread the floor with mats; and there you shall sit with a bed of mignonette at your side, and a hedge of honeysuckles, roses, and jasmine; and I will make you a bouquet of myrtle every day. Sooner than the time I mention the country will not be in complete beauty. And I will tell you what you shall find at your first entrance. Imprimis, as soon as you have entered the vestibule, if you cast a look on either side of you, you shall see on the right hand a box of my making. It is the box in which have been lodged all my hares, and in which lodges Puss at present. But he, poor fellow, is worn out with age, and promises to die before you can see him. On the right hand, stands a cupboard, the work of the same author; it was once a dove-cage, but I transformed it. Opposite to you stands a table, which I also made. But a merciless servant having scrubbed it until it became paralytic, it serves no purpose now but of ornament; and all my clean shoes stand under it. On the left hand, at the farther end of this superb vestibule, you will find the door of the parlour, into which I will conduct you, and where I will introduce you to Mrs Unwin, unless we should meet her before, and where we will be as happy as the day is long. Order yourself, my cousin, to the Swan at Newport, and there you shall find me ready to conduct you to Olney.

My dear, I have told Homer what you say about casks and urns, and have asked him, whether he is sure that it is a cask

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in which Jupiter keeps his wine. He swears that it is a cask, and that it will never be any thing better than a cask to eternity. So if the god is content with it, we must even wonder at his taste, and be so too. — Adieu! my dearest, dearest cousin, W. C.

208. — TO LADY HESKETH.

TRANSLATION — VEXATIONS OF CRITICISM — CHANCELLOR THURLOW.

OLNEY, *February* 11, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN, — It must be, I suppose, a fortnight or thereabout since I wrote last, I feel myself so alert and so ready to write again. Be that as it may, here I come. We talk of nobody but you. What we will do with you when we get you, where you shall walk, where you shall sleep, in short, every thing that bears the remotest relation to your well-being at Olney, occupies all our talking time, which is all that I do not spend at Troy.

I have every reason for writing to you as often as I can, but I have a particular reason for doing it now. I want to tell you that by the Diligence on Wednesday next, I mean to send you a quire of my Homer for Maty's perusal. It will contain the first book, and as much of the second as brings us to the catalogue of the ships, and is every morsel of the revised copy that I have transcribed. My dearest cousin, read it yourself, let the General read it, do what you please with it, so that it reach Johnson in due time. But let Maty be the only *critic* that has any thing to do with it. The vexation, the perplexity, that attends a multiplicity of criticisms by various hands, many of which are sure to be futile, many of them ill-founded, and some of them contradictory to others, is inconceivable, except by the author, whose ill-fated work happens to be the subject of them. This also appears to me self-evident — that if a work have passed under the review of one man of taste and learning, and have had the good fortune to please him, his approbation gives security for that of all others qualified like himself. I speak thus, my dear, after having just escaped from such a storm of trouble, occasioned by endless remarks, hints, suggestions, and objections, as drove me almost to despair, and to the very verge of a resolution to drop my undertaking for ever. With infinite difficulty I at last sifted the chaff from the wheat, availed myself of what appeared to me to be just, and rejected the rest, but not till

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the labour and anxiety had nearly undone all that Kerr had been doing for me. My beloved cousin, trust me for it, as you safely may, that temper, vanity, and self-importance, had nothing to do in all this distress that I suffered. It was merely the effect of an alarm, that I could not help taking, when I compared the great trouble I had with a few lines only, thus handled, with that which I foresaw such handling of the whole must necessarily give me. I felt beforehand that my constitution would not bear it. I shall send up this second specimen in a box that I have had made on purpose; and when Maty has done with the copy, and you have done with it yourself, then you must return it in said box to my translatorship. Though Johnson's friend has teased me sadly, I verily believe that I shall have no more such cause to complain of him. We now understand one another, and I firmly believe that I might have gone the world through, before I had found his equal in an accurate and familiar acquaintance with the original.

A letter to Mr Urban in the last Gentleman's Magazine, of which I 's book is the subject, pleases me more than any thing I have seen in the way of eulogium yet. I have no guess of the author.

I do not wish to remind the Chancellor of his promise. Ask you why, my cousin? Because I suppose it would be impossible. He has no doubt forgotten it entirely, and would be obliged to take my word for the truth of it, which I could not bear. We drank tea together with Mrs C——e, and her sister, in King Street, Bloomsbury, and there was the promise made. I said—"Thurlow, I am nobody, and shall be always nobody, and you will be Chancellor. You shall provide for me when you are?" He smiled, and replied, "I surely will." "These ladies," said I, "are witnesses." He still smiled, and said—"Let them be so, for I will certainly do it." But, alas! twenty-four years have passed since the day of the date thereof; and to mention it now would be to upbraid him with inattention to his plighted troth. Neither do I suppose he could easily serve such a creature as I am, if he would.—Adieu whom I love entirely, W. C.

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209.—TO LADY HESKETH.

HER VISIT TO OLNEY — SIMPLICITY THE MAIN CHARACTERISTIC OF HOMER.

OLNEY, *February* 19, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Since so it must be, so it shall be. If you will not sleep under the roof of a friend, may you never sleep under the roof of an enemy! An enemy, however, you will not presently find. Mrs Unwin bids me mention her affectionately, and tell you that she willingly gives up a part, for the sake of the rest—willingly, at least, as far as willingly may consist with some reluctance; I feel my reluctance too. Our design was, that you should have slept in the room that serves me for a study, and its having been occupied by you would have been an additional recommendation of it to me. But all reluctances are superseded by the thought of seeing you: and because we have nothing so much at heart as the wish to see you happy and comfortable, we are desirous, therefore, to accommodate you to your own mind, and not to ours. Mrs Unwin has already secured for you an apartment, or rather two, just such as we could wish. The house in which you will find them is within thirty yards of our own, and opposite to it. The whole affair is thus commodiously adjusted; and now I have nothing to do but to wish for June; and June, my cousin, was never so wished for since June was made. I shall have a thousand things to hear, and a thousand to say, and they will all rush into my mind together, till it will be so crowded with things impatient to be said, that for some time I shall say nothing. But no matter—sooner or later they will all come out; and since we shall have you the longer for not having you under our own roof, (a circumstance, that, more than any thing, reconciles us to that measure) they will stand the better chance. After so long a separation—a separation that of late seemed likely to last for life—we shall meet each other as alive from the dead; and for my own part I can truly say, that I have not a friend in the other world whose resurrection would give me greater pleasure.

I am truly happy, my dear, in having pleased you with what you have seen of my Homer. I wish that all English readers had your unsophisticated, or rather unadulterated taste, and could relish simplicity like you. But I am well aware that in this respect I am under a disadvantage, and

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that many, especially many ladies, missing many turns and prettinesses of expression, that they have admired in Pope, will account my translation in those particulars defective. But I comfort myself with the thought, that in reality it is no defect; on the contrary, that the want of all such embellishments as do not belong to the original will be one of its principal merits with persons indeed capable of relishing Homer. He is the best poet that ever lived for many reasons, but for none more than for that majestic plainness that distinguishes him from all others. As an accomplished person moves gracefully without thinking of it, in like manner the dignity of Homer seems to cost him no labour. It was natural to him to say great things, and to say them well, and little ornaments were beneath his notice. If Maty, my dearest cousin, should return to you my copy with any such strictures as may make it necessary for me to see it again, before it goes to Johnson, in that case you shall send it to me, otherwise to Johnson immediately; for he writes me word he wishes his friend to go to work upon it as soon as possible. When you come, my dear, we will hang all these critics together: for they have worried me without remorse of conscience; at least one of them has. I had actually murdered more than a few of the best lines in the specimen, in compliance with his requisitions, but plucked up my courage at last, and in the very last opportunity that I had recovered them to life again by restoring the original reading. At the same time I readily confess that the specimen is the better for all this discipline its author has undergone; but then it has been more indebted for its improvement to that pointed accuracy of examination, to which I was myself excited, than to any proposed amendments from Mr Critic: for as sure as you are my cousin, whom I long to see at Olney, so surely would he have done me irreparable mischief, if I would have given him leave.

My friend Bagot writes to me in a most friendly strain, and calls loudly upon me for original poetry. When I shall have done with Homer, probably he will not call in vain. Having found the prime feather of a swan on the banks of the *smug and silver Trent*, he keeps it for me.—Adieu, dear cousin, W. C.

I am sorry that the General has such indifferent health. He must not die. I can by no means spare a person so kind to me.

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210.—TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

CONDOLENCE ON THE DEATH OF MRS BAGOT.

OLNEY, *February* 27, 1786.

ALAS! alas! my dear, dear friend, may God himself comfort you! I will not be so absurd as to attempt it. By the close of your letter it should seem, that in this hour of great trial he withholds not his consolations from you. I know by experience that they are neither few nor small; and though I feel for you as I never felt for man before, yet do I sincerely rejoice in this, that whereas there is but one true Comforter in the universe, under afflictions such as yours, you both know him, and know where to seek him. I thought you a man the most happily mated that I had ever seen, and had great pleasure in your felicity. Pardon me, if now I feel a wish that, short as my acquaintance with her was, I had never seen her. I should have mourned with you, but not as I do now. Mrs Unwin smypathizes with you also most sincerely, and you neither are, nor will be soon forgotten in such prayers as we can make at Olney. I will not detain you longer now, my poor afflicted friend, than to commit you to the tender mercy of God, and to bid you a sorrowful adieu! —Adieu! ever yours, W. C.

211.—TO LADY HESKETH.

ELISIONS IN BLANK VERSE—LICENCE IN HIS TRANSLATION.

OLNEY, *March* 6, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Your opinion has more weight with me than that of all the critics in the world; and to give you a proof of it, I make you a concession that I would hardly have made to them all united. I do not, indeed, absolutely covenant, promise, and agree, that I will discard *all* my elisions, but I hereby bind myself to dismiss *as many* of them as, without sacrificing energy to sound, I can. It is incumbent upon me in the mean time to say something in justification of the few that I shall retain, that I may not seem a poet mounted rather on a mule than on Pegasus. In the first place, *The*, is a barbarism. We are indebted for it to the Celts, or the Goths, or to the Saxons, or perhaps to them all. In the two best languages that ever were spoken, the Greek and the Latin, there is no similar encumbrance of

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expression to be found.* Secondly, The perpetual use of it in our language is to us miserable poets attended with two great inconveniences. Our verse consisting only of ten syllables, it not unfrequently happens that a fifth part of the line is to be engrossed, and necessarily too, unless elision prevents it, by this abominable intruder; and, which is worse in my account, open vowels are continually the consequence— *The* element— *The* air, &c. Thirdly, The French, who are equally with the English chargeable with barbarism in this particular, dispose of their *Le* and their *La* without ceremony, and always take care that they shall be absorbed, both in verse and in prose, in the vowel that immediately follows them. Fourthly, and I believe lastly, (and for your sake I wish it may prove so,) the practice of cutting short *The* is warranted by Milton, who of all English poets that ever lived, had certainly the finest ear. Dr Warton, indeed, has dared to say that he had a bad one; for which he deserves, as far as critical demerit can deserve it, to lose his own. I thought I had done, but there is still a fifthly behind, and it is this, that the custom of abbreviating *The* belongs to the style in which, in my advertisement annexed to the specimen, I profess to write. The use of that style would have warranted me in the practice of much greater liberty of this sort than I ever intended to take. In perfect consistence with that style I might say, I' th' tempest, I' th' door-way, &c. which, however, I would not allow myself to do, because I was aware that it would be objected to, and with reason. But it seems to me for the causes above said, that when I shorten *The*, before a vowel, or before *wh*, as in the line you mention,

Than th' whole broad Hellespont in all its parts,

my licence is not equally exceptionable, because *W*, though he rank as a consonant in the word *whole*, is not allowed to announce himself to the ear; and *H* is an aspirate. But as I said at the beginning, so say I still, I am most willing to conform myself to your very sensible observation, that it is necessary, if we would please, to consult the taste of our own day; neither would I have pelted you, my dearest cousin, with any part of this volley of good reasons, had I not

* The want of a definite article is generally acknowledged to be a defect in the Greek and Latin languages, as detracting from precision of expression. Cowper, in the text, falls into a common mistake with more classical scholars, of regarding all others as corruptions of their favourite tongues.

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designed them as an answer to those objections which you say you have heard from others. But I only mention them Though satisfactory to myself, I wave them, and will allow to *The* his whole dimensions, whensoever it can be done.

Thou only critic of my verse that is to be found in all the earth, whom I love, what shall I say in answer to your own objection to that passage,

> Softly he placed his hand
> On th' old man's hand, and push'd it gently away.

I can say neither more nor less than this, that when our dear friend, the General, sent me his opinion of the specimen, quoting those very words from it, he added, "With this part I was particularly pleased; there is nothing in poetry more descriptive." Such were his very words. Taste, my dear, is various, there is nothing so various, and even between persons of the best taste there are diversities of opinion on the same subject, for which it is not possible to account. So much for these matters.

You advise me to consult the General, and to confide in him. I follow your advice, and have done both. By the last post I asked his permission to send him the books of my Homer, as fast as I should finish them off. I shall be glad of his remarks, and more glad than of any thing to do that which I hope may be agreeable to him. They will of course pass into your hands before they are sent to Johnson. The quire that I sent is now in the hands of Johnson's friend. I intended to have told you in my last, but forgot it, that Johnson behaves very handsomely in the affair of my two volumes. He acts with a liberality not often found in persons of his occupation, and to mention it, when occasion calls me to it, is a justice due to him.

I am very much pleased with Mr Stanley's letter—several compliments were paid me, on the subject of that first volume, by my own friends; but I do not recollect that I ever knew the opinion of a stranger about it before, whether favourable or otherwise; I only heard by a side wind, that it was very much read in Scotland, and more than here.

Farewell, my dearest cousin, whom we expect, of whom we talk continually, and whom we continually long for.

W. C.

Your anxious wishes for my success delight me, and you may rest assured, my dear, that I have all the ambition on the

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subject that you can wish me to feel. I more than admire my author. I often stand astonished at his beauties. I am for ever amused with the translation of him, and I have received a thousand encouragements. These are all so many happy omens, that I hope shall be verified by the event.

212.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

REVISION OF THE TRANSLATION.

March 13, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I seem to be about to write to you, but I foresee that it will not be a letter, but a scrap that I shall send you. I could tell you things that, knowing how much you interest yourself in my success, I am sure would please you, but every moment of my leisure is necessarily spent at Troy. I am revising my translation, and bestowing on it more labour than at first. At the repeated solicitation of General Cowper, who had doubtless irrefragable reason on his side, I have put my book into the hands of the most extraordinary critic that I have ever heard of. He is a Swiss; has an accurate knowledge of English, and for his knowledge of Homer has, I verily believe, no fellow. Johnson recommended him to me. I am to send him the quires as fast as I finish them off, and the first is now in his hands. I have the comfort to be able to tell you, that he is very much pleased with what he has seen. Johnson wrote to me lately on purpose to tell me so. Things having taken this turn, I fear that I must beg a release from my engagement to put the MS. into your hands. I am bound to print as soon as three hundred shall have subscribed, and consequently have not an hour to spare.

People generally love to go where they are admired, yet Lady Hesketh complains of not having seen you.—Yours,

W. C.

213.—TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

STATING REASONS FOR NOT POINTING OUT THE ERRORS OF POPE'S VERSION.

April 5, 1786.

I DID, as you suppose, bestow all possible consideration on the subject of an apology for my Homerican undertaking. I turned the matter about in my mind an hundred different

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ways; and in every way in which it would present itself, found it an impracticable business. It is impossible for me, with what delicacy soever I may manage it, to state the objections that lie against Pope's translation, without incurring odium, and the imputation of arrogance: foreseeing this danger, I choose to say nothing. W. C.

P. S.—You may well wonder at my courage who have undertaken a work of such enormous length. You would wonder more if you knew that I translated the whole Iliad with no other help than a Clavis. But I have since equipped myself better for this immense journey, and am revising the work in company with a good commentator.

214. — TO LADY HESKETH.

ON DEFERRING HER VISIT — THE VICARAGE — ANONYMOUS PRESENT — EARLY DAYS.

OLNEY, *April* 17, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—If you will not quote Solomon, my dearest cousin, I will. He says, and as beautifully as truly, "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life!" I feel how much reason he had on his side when he made this observation, and am myself sick of your fortnight's delay.

* * * * * * *

The vicarage was built by Lord Dartmouth, and was not finished till some time after we arrived at Olney, consequently it is new. It is a smart stone building well sashed, by much too good for the living, but just what I would wish for you. It has, as you justly concluded from my premises, a garden, but rather calculated for use than ornament. It is square, and well walled, but has neither arbour, nor alcove, nor other shade, except the shadow of the house. But we have two gardens, which are yours. Between your mansion and ours is interposed nothing but an orchard, into which a door opening out of our garden affords us the easiest communication imaginable, will save the roundabout by the town, and make both houses one. Your chamber windows look over the river, and over the meadows, to a village called Emberton, and command the whole length of a long bridge, described by a certain poet, together with a view of the road at a distance.

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Should you wish for books at Olney, you must bring them with you, or you will wish in vain; for I have none but the works of a certain poet, Cowper, of whom perhaps you have heard, and they are as yet but two volumes. They may multiply hereafter, but at present they are no more.

You are the first person for whom I have heard Mrs Unwin express such feelings as she does for you. She is not profuse in professions, nor forward to enter into treaties of friendship with new faces, but when her friendship is once engaged, it may be confided in even unto death. She loves you already, and how much more will she love you before this time twelvemonth! I have indeed endeavoured to describe you to her, but perfectly as I have you by heart, I am sensible that my picture cannot do you justice. I never saw one that did. Be you what you may, you are much beloved, and will be so at Olney; and Mrs U. expects you with the pleasure that one feels at the return of a long absent dear relation—that is to say, with a pleasure such as mine. She sends you her warmest affections.

On Friday I received a letter from dear Anonymous, apprising me of a parcel that the coach would bring me on Saturday. Who is there in the world that has, or thinks he has, reason to love me to the degree that he does? But it is no matter. He chooses to be unknown; and his choice is, and ever shall be, so sacred to me, that if his name lay on the table before me reversed, I would not turn the paper about that I might read it. Much as it would gratify me to thank him, I would turn my eyes away from the forbidden discovery. I long to assure him that those same eyes, concerning which he expresses such kind apprehensions lest they should suffer by this laborious undertaking, are as well as I could expect them to be, if I were never to touch either book or pen. Subject to weakness, and occasional slight inflammations, it is probable that they will always be; but I cannot remember the time when they enjoyed any thing so like an exemption from those infirmities as at present. One would almost suppose that reading Homer were the best ophthalmic in the world. I should be happy to remove his solicitude on the subject, but it is a pleasure that he will not let me enjoy. Well, then, I will be content without it; and so content, that though I believe you, my dear, to be in full possession of all this mystery, you shall never know me, while you live, either directly, or by hints of any sort, attempt to extort or to steal the secret from you. I should think myself as justly punish-

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able as the Bethshemites, for looking into the ark which they were not allowed to touch.

I have not sent for Kerr, for Kerr can do nothing but send me to Bath, and to Bath I cannot go for a thousand reasons. The summer will set me up again; I grow fat every day, and shall be as big as Gog or Magog, or both put together, before you come.

I did actually live three years with Mr Chapman, a solicitor, that is to say, I slept three years in his house, but I lived, that is to say, I spent my days, in Southampton Row, as you very well remember. There was I, and the future Lord Chancellor, constantly employed from morning to night in giggling and making giggle, instead of studying the law. O fie, cousin! how could you do so? I am pleased with Lord Thurlow's inquiries about me. If he takes it into that inimitable head of his, he may make a man of me yet. I could love him heartily, if he would but deserve it at my hands. That I did so once is certain. The Duchess of ———, who in the world set her a-going? But if all the duchesses in the world were spinning like so many whirligigs for my benefit, I would not stop them. It is a noble thing to be a poet, it makes all the world so lively. I might have preached more sermons than even Tillotson did, and better, and the world would have been still fast asleep; but a volume of verse is a fiddle that puts the universe in motion.— Yours, my dear friend and cousin, W. C.

215.—TO LADY HESKETH.

THE SAME SUBJECT—COMFORT OF HER LETTERS.

OLNEY, *April* 24, 1786.

YOUR letters are so much my comfort, that I often tremble lest by any accident I should be disappointed; and the more because you have been, more than once, so engaged in company on the writing day, that I have had a narrow escape. Let me give you a piece of good counsel, my cousin: follow my laudable example, write when you can, take Time's forelock in one hand, and a pen in the other, and so make sure of your opportunity. It is well for me that you write faster than any body, and more in an hour than other people in two, else I know not what would become of me. When I read your letters I hear you talk, and I love talking letters dearly,

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especially from you. Well! the middle of June will not be always a thousand years off, and when it comes I shall hear you, and see you too, and shall not care a farthing then if you do not touch a pen in a month. By the way, you must either send me, or bring me some more paper, for before the moon shall have performed a few more revolutions I shall not have a scrap left, and tedious revolutions they are just now, that is certain.

I give you leave to be as peremptory as you please, especially at a distance; but when you say that you are a Cowper (and the better it is for the Cowpers that such you are, and I give them joy of you, with all my heart) you must not forget that I boast myself a Cowper too, and have my humours, and fancies, and purposes, and determinations, as well as others of my name, and hold them as fast as they can. *You* indeed tell *me* how often I shall see you when you come. A pretty story truly. I am a *he* Cowper, my dear, and claim the privileges that belong to my noble sex. But these matters shall be settled, as my cousin Agamemnon used to say, at a more convenient time.

I shall rejoice to see the letter you promise me, for though I met with a morsel of praise last week, I do not know that the week current is likely to produce me any, and having lately been pretty much pampered with that diet, I expect to find myself rather hungry by the time when your next letter shall arrive. It will therefore be very opportune. The morsel, above alluded to, came from—whom do you think? From ———, but she desires that her authorship may be a secret. And in my answer I promised not to divulge it except to you. It is a pretty copy of verses, neatly written, and well turned, and when you come you shall see them. I intend to keep all pretty things to myself till then, that they may serve me as a bait to lure you hither more effectually. The last letter that I had from——— I received so many years since, that it seems as if it had reached me a good while before I was born.

I was grieved at the heart that the General could not come, and that illness was in part the cause that hindered him. I have sent him, by his express desire, a new edition of the first book, and half the second. He would not suffer me to send it to you, my dear, lest you should post it away to Maty at once. He did not give that reason, but, being shrewd, I found it.

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The grass begins to grow, and the leaves to bud, and every thing is preparing to be beautiful against you come.— Adieu,

W. C.

You inquire of our walks, I perceive, as well as our rides. They are beautiful. You inquire also concerning a cellar. You have two cellars. Oh! what years have passed since we took the same walks, and drank out of the same bottle! but a few more weeks, and then!

216.—TO LADY HESKETH.

INJURIOUS CRITICISMS — COLMAN'S AND MATY'S OPINIONS OF HIS TRANSLATIONS — VEXATIONS OF ALTERING — WESTON.

OLNEY, *May* 8, 1786.

I DID not at all doubt that your tenderness for my feelings had inclined you to suppress in your letters to me the intelligence concerning Maty's critique, that yet reached me from another quarter. When I wrote to you, I had not learned it from the General, but from my friend Bull, who only knew it by hearsay. The next post brought me the news of it from the first-mentioned, and the critique itself enclosed. Together with it came also a squib discharged against me in the Public Advertiser. The General's letter found me in one of my most melancholy moods, and my spirits did not rise on the receipt of it. The letter indeed that he had cut from the newspaper gave me little pain, both because it contained nothing formidable, though written with malevolence enough, and because a nameless author can have no more weight with his readers than the reason which he has on his side can give him. But Maty's animadversions hurt me more. In part they appeared to me unjust, and in part ill-natured; and yet the man himself being an oracle in every body's account, I apprehended that he had done me much mischief. Why he says that the translation is far from exact, is best known to himself. For I know it to be as exact as is compatible with poetry; and prose translations of Homer are not wanted—the world has one already. But I will not fill my letter to you with hypercriticisms; I will only add an extract from a letter of Colman's, that I received last Friday, and will then dismiss the subject. It came accompanied by a copy of the specimen, which he himself had amended, and with so much taste and candour that it charmed me. He says as follows:

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"One copy I have returned, with some remarks prompted by my zeal for your success, not, Heaven knows, by arrogance or impertinence. I know no other way at once so plain, and so short, of delivering my thoughts on the specimen of your translation, which, on the whole, I admire exceedingly, thinking it breathes the spirit, and conveys the manner of the original; though, having here neither Homer nor Pope's Homer, I cannot speak precisely of particular lines or expressions, or compare your blank verse with his rhyme, except by declaring, that I think blank verse infinitely more congenial to the magnificent simplicity of Homer's hexameters, than the confined couplets, and the jingle of rhyme."

His amendments are chiefly bestowed on the lines encumbered with elisions, and I will just take this opportunity to tell you, my dear, because I know you to be as much interested in what I write as myself, that some of the most offensive of those elisions were occasioned by mere criticism. I was fairly hunted into them, by vexatious objections made without end by ——— and his friend, and altered, and altered, till at last I did not care how I altered. Many thanks for ———'s verses, which deserve just the character you give of them. They are neat and easy; but I would mumble her well, if I could get at her, for allowing herself to suppose for a moment that I praised the Chancellor with a view to emolument. I wrote those stanzas merely for my own amusement, and they slept in a dark closet years after I composed them, not in the least designed for publication. But when Johnson had printed off the longer pieces, of which the first volume principally consists, he wrote me word that he wanted yet two thousand lines to swell it to a proper size. On that occasion it was that I collected every scrap of verse that I could find, and that among the rest. None of the smaller poems had been introduced, or had been published at all with my name, but for this necessity.

Just as I wrote the last word, I was called down to Dr Kerr, who came to pay me a voluntary visit. Were I sick, his cheerful and friendly manner would almost restore me. Air and exercise are his theme; them he recommends as the best physic for me, and in all weathers. Come, therefore, my dear, and take a little of this good physic with me, for you will find it beneficial as well as I; come and assist Mrs Unwin in the re-establishment of your cousin's health. Air and exercise, and she and you together, will make me a perfect Samson. You will have a good house over your head,

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comfortable apartments, obliging neighbours, good roads, a pleasant country, and in us your constant companions, two who will love you, and do already love you dearly, and with all our hearts. If you are in any danger of trouble, it is from myself, if my fits of dejection seize me; and as often as they do, you will be grieved for me; but perhaps by your assistance I shall be able to resist them better. If there is a creature under heaven, from whose co-operations with Mrs Unwin I can reasonably expect such a blessing, that creature is yourself. I was not without such attacks when I lived in London, though at that time they were less oppressive, but in your company I was never unhappy a whole day in all my life.

Of how much importance is an author to himself! I return to that abominable specimen again, just to notice Maty's impatient censure of the repetition that you mention. I mean of the word *hand*. In the original there is not a repetition of it: but to repeat a word in that manner, and on such an occasion, is by no means, what he calls it, a *modern* invention. In Homer I could shew him many such, and in Virgil they abound. Colman, who, in his judgment of classical matters, is inferior to none, says, "*I know not why Maty objects to this expression.*" I could easily change it: but the case standing thus, I know not whether my proud stomach will condescend so low. I rather feel myself disinclined to it.

One evening last week, Mrs Unwin and I took our walk to Weston, and as we were returning through the grove opposite the house, the Throckmortons presented themselves at the door. They are owners of a house at Weston, at present empty. It is a very good one, infinitely superior to ours. When we drank chocolate with them, they both expressed their ardent desire that we would take it, wishing to have us for nearer neighbours. If you, my cousin, were not so well provided for as you are, and at our very elbow, I verily believe I should have mustered up all my rhetoric to recommend it to you. You might have it for ever without danger of ejectment, whereas your possession of the vicarage depends on the life of the vicar, who is eighty-six. The environs are most beautiful, and the village itself one of the prettiest I ever saw. Add to this, you would step immediately into Mr Throckmorton's pleasure ground, where you would not soil your slipper even in winter. A most unfortunate mistake was made by that gentleman's bailiff in his absence. Just before he left Weston last year for the winter, he gave him orders to cut short the tops of the flowering

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shrubs, that lined a serpentine walk in a delightful grove, celebrated by my poetship in a little piece that you remember was called the Shrubbery. The dunce, misapprehending the order, cut down and faggoted up the whole grove, leaving neither tree, bush, nor twig; nothing but stumps about as high as my ankle. Mrs T. told us that she never saw her husband so angry in his life. I judge indeed, by his physiognomy, which has great sweetness in it, that he is very little addicted to that infernal passion. But had he cudgelled the man for his cruel blunder, and the havoc made in consequence of it, I could have excused him.

I felt myself really concerned for the Chancellor's illness, and from what I learned of it, both from the papers, and from General Cowper, concluded that he must die. I am accordingly delighted in the same proportion with the news of his recovery. May he live, and live to be still the support of government! If it shall be his good pleasure to render me personally any material service, I have no objection to it. But Heaven knows, that it is impossible for any living wight to bestow less thought on that subject than myself. — May God be ever with you, my beloved cousin! W. C.

217. — TO LADY HESKETH.

ANTICIPATIONS OF MEETING — HIS TEMPERAMENT SENSITIVE, YET AMBITIOUS — PROPER CULTIVATION OF TALENT A CHRISTIAN DUTY.

OLNEY, *May* 15, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN, — From this very morning I begin to date the last month of our long separation, and confidently and most comfortably hope that before the fifteenth of June shall present itself, we shall have seen each other. Is it not so? And will it not be one of the most extraordinary eras of my extraordinary life? A year ago, we neither corresponded, nor expected to meet in this world. But this world is a scene of marvellous events, many of them more marvellous than fiction itself would dare to hazard; and, blessed be God, they are not all of the distressing kind. Now and then, in the course of an existence whose hue is for the most part sable, a day turns up that makes amends for many sighs, and many subjects of complaint. Such a day shall I account the day of your arrival at Olney.

Wherefore is it, canst thou tell me, that together with all those delightful sensations, to which the sight of a long absent

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dear friend gives birth, there is a mixture of something painful; flutterings, and tumults, and I know not what accompaniments of our pleasure, that are, in fact, perfectly foreign from the occasion? Such I feel when I think of our meeting; and such, I suppose, feel you; and the nearer the crisis approaches, the more I am sensible of them. I know beforehand that they will increase with every turn of the wheels that shall convey me to Newport, when I shall set out to meet you, and that when we actually meet, the pleasure, and this unaccountable pain together, will be as much as I shall be able to support. I am utterly at a loss for the cause, and can only resolve it into that appointment, by which it has been foreordained that all human delights shall be qualified and mingled with their contraries. For there is nothing formidable in you. To me, at least, there is nothing such, no, not even in your menaces, unless when you threaten me to write no more. Nay, I verily believe, did I not know you to be what you are, and had less affection for you than I have, I should have fewer of these emotions, of which I would have none if I could help it. But a fig for them all! Let us resolve to combat with, and to conquer them — they are dreams — they are illusions of the judgment. Some enemy that hates the happiness of human kind, and is ever industrious to dash it, works them in us; and their being so perfectly unreasonable as they are is a proof of it. Nothing that is such can be the work of a good agent. This I know, too, by experience, that, like all other illusions, they exist only by force of imagination, are indebted for their prevalence to the absence of their object, and in a few moments after its appearance, cease. So, then, this is a settled point, and the case stands thus, —you will tremble as you draw near to Newport, and so shall I: but we will both recollect that there is no reason why we should, and this recollection will at least have some little effect in our favour. We will likewise both take the comfort of what we know to be true, that the tumult will soon cease, and the pleasure long survive the pain, even as long, I trust, as we ourselves shall survive it.

What you say of Maty gives me all the consolation that you intended. We both think it highly probable that you suggest the true cause of his displeasure, when you suppose him mortified at not having had a part of the translation laid before him, ere the specimen was published. The General was very much hurt, and calls his censures harsh and unreasonable. He likewise sent me a consolatory letter on the occasion,

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in which he took the kindest pains to heal the wound that he supposed I might have suffered. I am not naturally insensible, and the sensibilities that I had by nature have been wonderfully enhanced by a long series of shocks, given to a frame of nerves that was never very athletic. I feel accordingly, whether painful or pleasant, in the extreme — am easily elevated, and easily cast down. The frown of a critic freezes my poetical powers, and discourages me to a degree that makes me ashamed of my own weakness. Yet I presently recover my confidence again. The half of what you so kindly say in your last, would at any time restore my spirits, and, being said by you, is infallible. I am not ashamed to confess, that having commenced an author, I am most abundantly desirous to succeed as such. *I have, what perhaps you little suspect me of, in my nature an infinite share of ambition.* But with it I have at the same time, as you well know, an equal share of diffidence. To this combination of opposite qualities it has been owing that, till lately, I stole through life without undertaking any thing, yet always wishing to distinguish myself. At last I ventured, ventured too in the only path that at so late a period was yet open to me; and am determined, if God have not determined otherwise, to work my way through the obscurity that has been so long my portion, into notice. Every thing, therefore, that seems to threaten this my favourite purpose with disappointment, affects me nearly. I suppose that all ambitious minds are in the same predicament. He who seeks distinction must be sensible of disapprobation, exactly in the same proportion as he desires applause. And now, my precious cousin, I have unfolded my heart to you in this particular, without a speck of dissimulation. Some people, and good people too, would blame me. But you will not; and they, I think, would blame without just cause. We certainly do not honour God when we bury, or when we neglect to improve, as far as we may, whatever talent he may have bestowed on us, whether it be little or much. In natural things, as well as in spiritual, it is a never failing truth, that to him who *hath* (that is, to him who occupies what he hath diligently, and so as to increase it) more shall be given. Set me down, therefore, my dear, for an industrious rhymer, so long as I shall have the ability. For in this only way is it possible for me, so far as I can see, either to honour God, or to serve man, or even to serve myself.

I rejoice to hear that Mr Throckmorton wishes to be on a

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more intimate footing. I am shy, and suspect that he is not very much otherwise; and the consequence has been that we have mutually wished an acquaintance without being able to accomplish it. Blessings on you for the hint that you dropped on the subject of the house at Weston! For the burden of my song is —"Since we have met once again, let us never be separated, as we have been, more." W. C.

218.— TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

ADVANTAGES OF DELAY AND REVISION BEFORE PUBLISHING.

OLNEY, *May* 20, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—About three weeks since I met your sister Chester at Mr Throckmorton's, and from her learned that you are at Blithfield, and in health. Upon the encouragement of this information it is that I write now; I should not otherwise have known with certainty where to find you, or have been equally free from the fear of unseasonable intrusion. May God be with you, my friend, and give you a just measure of submission to his will, the most effectual of all remedies for the evils of this changing scene. I doubt not that He has granted you this blessing already, and may He still continue it!

Now I will talk a little about myself; for except myself, living in this *terrarum angulo*, what can I have to talk about? In a scene of perfect tranquillity, and the profoundest silence, I am kicking up the dust of heroic narrative, and besieging Troy again. I told you that I had almost finished the translation of the Iliad, and I verily thought so. But I was never more mistaken. By the time when I had reached the end of the poem, the first book of my version was a twelvemonth old. When I came to consider it after having laid it by so long, it did not satisfy me. I set myself to mend it, and I did so. But still it appeared to me improvable, and that nothing would so effectually secure that point as to give the whole book a new translation. With the exception of very few lines I have so done, and was never in my life so convinced of the soundness of Horace's advice, to publish nothing in haste; so much advantage have I derived from doing that twice which I thought I had accomplished notably at once. He indeed recommends nine years' imprisonment of your verses before you send them abroad; but the ninth part of that time is, I believe, as much as there is need of to open a man's eyes upon

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his own defects, and to secure him from the danger of premature self-approbation. Neither ought it to be forgotten that nine years make so wide an interval between the cup and the lip, that a thousand things may fall out between. New engagements may occur, which may make the finishing of that which a poet has begun impossible. In nine years he may rise into a situation, or he may sink into one, utterly incompatible with his purpose. His constitution may break in nine years, and sickness may disqualify him for improving what he enterprised in the days of health. His inclination may change, and he may find some other employment more agreeable, or another poet may enter upon the same work, and get the start of him. Therefore, my friend Horace, though I acknowledge your principle to be good, I must confess that I think the practice you would ground upon it carried to an extreme. The rigour that I exercised upon the first book, I intend to exercise upon all that follow, and have now actually advanced into the middle of the seventh, no where admitting more than one line in fifty of the first translation. You must not imagine that I had been careless and hasty in the first instance. In truth I had not, but in rendering so excellent a poet as Homer into our language, there are so many points to be attended to, both in respect of language and numbers, that a first attempt must be fortunate indeed if it does not call aloud for a second. You saw the specimen, and you saw, I am sure, one great fault in it, — I mean the harshness of some of the elisions. I do not altogether take the blame of these myself, for into some of them I was actually driven and hunted by a series of reiterated objections made by a critical friend, whose scruples and delicacies teazed me out of all my patience. But no such monsters will be found in the volume.

Your brother Chester has furnished me with Barnes's Homer, from whose notes I collect here and there some useful information, and whose fair and legible type preserves me from the danger of being as blind as was my author. I saw a sister of yours at Mr Throckmorton's, but I am not good at making myself heard across a large room, and therefore nothing passed between us. I felt, however, that she was my friend's sister, and much esteemed her for your sake.— Ever yours, W. C.

P.S.—The swan is called *argutus*, I suppose, *a non arguendo*, and *canorus a non canendo*. But whether he be dumb or

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vocal, more poetical than the eagle or less, it is no matter. A feather of either, in token of your approbation and esteem, will never, you may rest assured, be an offence to me.

219. — TO LADY HESKETH.

DELAY OF HER VISIT — SIMILARITY OF THE TASK TO THE STYLE OF YOUNG — STATE OF HIS SPIRITS.

OLNEY, *May* 25, 1786.

I HAVE at length, my cousin, found my way into my summer abode. I believe that I described it to you some time since, and will therefore now leave it undescribed. I will only say that I am writing in a bandbox, situated, at least in my account, delightfully, because it has a window in one side that opens into that orchard, through which, as I am sitting here, I shall see you often pass, and which therefore I already prefer to all the orchards in the world. You do well to prepare me for all possible delays, because in this life all sorts of disappointments are possible; and I shall do well, if any such delay of your journey should happen, to practise that lesson of patience which you inculcate. But it is a lesson which, even with you for my teacher, I shall be slow to learn. Being sure, however, that you will not procrastinate without cause, I will make myself as easy as I can about it, and hope the best. To convince you how much I am under discipline and good advice, I will lay aside a favourite measure, influenced in doing so by nothing but the good sense of your contrary opinion. I had set my heart on meeting you at Newport. In my haste to see you once again, I was willing to overlook many awkwardnesses I could not but foresee would attend it. I put them aside so long as I only foresaw them myself, but since I find that you foresee them too, I can no longer deal so slightly with them. It is therefore determined that we meet at Olney. Much I shall feel, but I will not die if I can help it, and I beg that you will take all possible care to outlive it likewise, for I know what it is to be balked in the moment of acquisition, and should be loath to know it again.

Last Monday, in the evening, we walked to Weston, according to our usual custom. It happened, owing to a mistake of time, that we set out half an hour sooner than usual. This mistake we discovered, while we were in the Wilderness. So, finding that we had time before us, as they say, Mrs Unwin proposed that we should go into the village,

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and take a view of the house that I had just mentioned to you. We did so, and found it such a one as in most respects would suit you well. But Moses Brown, our vicar, who, as I told you, is in his eighty-sixth year, is not bound to die for that reason. He said himself, when he was here last summer, that he should live ten years longer, and for aught that appears, so he may. In which case, for the sake of its near neighbourhood to us, the vicarage has charms for me, that no other place can rival. But this, and a thousand things more, shall be talked over when you come.

We have been industriously cultivating our acquaintance with our Weston neighbours since I wrote last, and they on their part have been equally diligent in the same cause. I have a notion, that we shall all suit well. I see much in them both that I admire. You know perhaps that they are Catholics.

It is a delightful bundle of praise, my cousin, that you have sent me. All jasmine and lavender. Whoever the lady is, she has evidently an admirable pen, and a cultivated mind. If a person reads, it is no matter in what language, and if the mind be informed, it is no matter whether that mind belongs to a man or a woman. The taste and the judgment will receive the benefit alike in both. Long before the Task was published, I made an experiment one day, being in a frolicksome mood, upon my friend. We were walking in the garden, and conversing on a subject similar to these lines,—

> The few that pray at all, pray oft amiss,
> And seeking grace t' improve the present good,
> Would urge a wiser suit than asking more.

I repeated them, and said to him, with an air of *nonchalance*, "Do you recollect those lines? I have seen them somewhere; where are they?" He put on a considering face, and after some deliberation replied,—"Oh, I will tell you where they must be—in the Night Thoughts." I was glad my trial turned out so well, and did not undeceive him. I mention this occurrence only in confirmation of the letter writer's opinion, but at the same time I do assure you, on the faith of an honest man, that I never in my life designed an imitation of Young, or of any other writer; for mimicry is my abhorrence, at least in poetry.

Assure yourself, my dearest cousin, that both for your sake, since you make a point of it, and for my own, I will be as philosophically careful as possible that these fine nerves of

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mine shall not be beyond measure agitated when you arrive. In truth, there is much greater probability that they will be benefited, and greatly too. Joy of heart, from whatever occasion it may arise, is the best of all nervous medicines; and I should not wonder if such a turn given to my spirits should have even a lasting effect, of the most advantageous kind, upon them. You must not imagine neither, that I am on the whole in any great degree subject to nervous affections; occasionally I am, and have been these many years, much liable to dejection. But at intervals, and sometimes for an interval of weeks, no creature would suspect it. For I have not that which commonly is a symptom of such a case belonging to me, — I mean extraordinary elevation in the absence of Mr Bluedevil. When I am in the best health, my tide of animal sprightliness flows with great equality, so that I am never, at any time, exalted in proportion as I am sometimes depressed. My depression has a cause, and if that cause were to cease, I should be as cheerful thenceforth, and perhaps for ever, as any man need be. But, as I have often said, Mrs Unwin shall be my expositor.

Adieu, my beloved cousin. God grant that our friendship, which, while we could see each other, never suffered a moment's interruption, and which so long a separation has not in the least abated, may glow in us to our last hour, and be renewed in a better world, there to be perpetuated for ever! For you must know, that I should not love you half so well, if I did not believe you would be my friend to eternity. There is not room enough for friendship to unfold itself in full bloom in such a nook of life as this. Therefore I am, and must, and will be, yours for ever, W. C.

220. — TO LADY HESKETH.

REGRET ON THE PASSING OF SPRING DURING HER PROLONGED ABSENCE — HOMER — STATE OF HEALTH.

OLNEY, *May* 29, 1786.

THOU dear, comfortable cousin, whose letters among all that I receive, have this property peculiarly their own, that I expect them without trembling, and never find any thing in them that does not give me pleasure; for which, therefore, I would take nothing in exchange that the world could give me, save and except that for which I must exchange them

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soon, — and happy shall I be to do so, — your own company. That, indeed, is delayed a little too long; to my impatience at least it seems so, who find the spring, backward as it is, too forward, because many of its beauties will have faded before you will have an opportunity to see them. We took our customary walk yesterday in the Wilderness at Weston, and saw with regret, the laburnums, syringas, and guelder-roses, some of them blown, and others just upon the point of blowing, and could not help observing — all these will be gone before Lady Hesketh comes. Still, however, there will be roses, and jasmine, and honeysuckle, and shady walks and cool alcoves, and you will partake them with us. But I want you to have a share of every thing that is delightful here, and cannot bear that the advance of the season should steal away a single pleasure before you can come to enjoy it.

Every day I think of you, and almost all the day long; I will venture to say, that even *you* were never so expected in your life. I called last week at the Quaker's to see the furniture of your bed, the fame of which had reached me. It is, I assure you, superb, of printed cotton, and the subject classical. Every morning you will open your eyes on Phaeton kneeling to Apollo, and imploring his father to grant him the conduct of his chariot for a day. May your sleep be as sound as your bed will be sumptuous, and your nights at least will be well provided for.

I shall send up the sixth and seventh books of the Iliad shortly, and shall address them to you. You will forward them to the General. I long to shew you my workshop, and to see you sitting on the opposite side of my table. We shall be as close packed as two wax figures in an old fashioned picture frame. I am writing in it now. It is the place in which I fabricate all my verse in summer time. I rose an hour sooner than usual this morning, that I might finish my sheet before breakfast, for I must write this day to the General.

The grass under my windows is all bespangled with dew-drops, and the birds are singing in the apple trees, among the blossoms. Never poet had a more commodious oratory in which to invoke his muse.

I have made your heart ache too often, my poor dear cousin, with talking about my fits of dejection. Something has happened that has led me to the subject, or I would have mentioned them more sparingly. Do not suppose, or suspect

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that I treat you with reserve; there is nothing in which I am concerned that you shall not be made acquainted with. But the tale is too long for a letter. I will only add, for your present satisfaction, that the cause is not exterior, that it is not within the reach of human aid, and that yet I have a hope myself, and Mrs Unwin a strong persuasion, of its removal. I am, indeed, even now, and have been for a considerable time, sensible of a change for the better, and expect, with good reason, a comfortable lift from you. Guess then, my beloved cousin, with what wishes I look forward to the time of your arrival, from whose coming I promise myself not only pleasure, but peace of mind, at least an additional share of it. At present it is an uncertain and transient guest with me, but the joy with which I shall see and converse with you at Olney, may perhaps make it an abiding one. W. C.

221. — TO LADY HESKETH.

REMINISCENCES OF YOUTH — PRAYERS IN LATIN — THE THROCKMORTONS.

OLNEY, *June 4 and 5*, 1786.

AH! my cousin, you begin already to fear and quake. What a hero am I, compared with you. I have no fears of *you*. On the contrary, am as bold as a lion. I wish that your carriage were even now at the door. You should soon see with how much courage I would face you. But what cause have you for fear? Am I not your cousin, with whom you have wandered in the fields of Freemantle, and at Bevis's Mount? who used to read to you, laugh with you, till our sides have ached, at any thing, or nothing? And am I in these respects at all altered? You will not find me so; but just as ready to laugh, and to wander, as you ever knew me. A cloud, perhaps, may come over me now and then, for a few hours, but from clouds I was never exempted. And are not you the identical cousin with whom I have performed all these feats? The very Harriet whom I saw, for the first time, at De Grey's, in Norfolk Street? (It was on a Sunday, when you came with my uncle and aunt to drink tea there, and I had dined there, and was just going back to Westminster.) If these things are so, and I am sure that you cannot gainsay a syllable of them all, then this consequence follows, that I do not promise myself more pleasure from your company than I shall be sure to find. Then you are my cousin, in whom I always delighted, and in whom I doubt

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not that I shall delight even to my latest hour. But this wicked coachmaker has sunk my spirits. What a miserable thing it is to depend, in any degree, for the accomplishment of a wish, and that wish so fervent, on the punctuality of a creature, who, I suppose, was never punctual in his life! Do tell him, my dear, in order to quicken him, that if he performs his promise, he shall make my coach, when I want one, and that if he performs it not, I will most assuredly employ some other man.

The Throckmortons sent a note to invite us to dinner — we went, and a very agreeable day we had. They made no fuss with us, which I was heartily glad to see, for where I give trouble, I am sure that I cannot be welcome. Themselves, and their chaplain, and we, were all the party. After dinner we had much cheerful and pleasant talk, the particulars of which might not perhaps be so entertaining upon paper; therefore, all but one I will omit, and that I will mention only because it will of itself be sufficient to give you an insight into their opinion on a very important subject, — their own religion. I happened to say, that in all professions and trades mankind affected an air of mystery. Physicians, I observed, in particular, were objects of that remark, who persist in prescribing in Latin, many times, no doubt, to the hazard of a patient's life, through the ignorance of an apothecary. Mr Throckmorton assented to what I said, and turning to his chaplain, to my infinite surprise observed to him, "*That is just as absurd as our praying in Latin.*" I could have hugged him for his liberality, and freedom from bigotry, but thought it rather more decent to let the matter pass without any visible notice. I therefore heard it with pleasure, and kept my pleasure to myself. The two ladies in the meantime were tête-à-tête in the drawing-room. Their conversation turned principally (as I afterwards learned from Mrs Unwin) on a most delightful topic, — namely, myself. In the first place, Mrs Throckmorton admired my book, from which she quoted by heart more than I could repeat, though I so lately wrote it.

In short, my dear, I cannot proceed to relate what she said of the book, and the book's author, for that abominable modesty that I cannot even yet get rid of. Let it suffice to say, that you, who are disposed to love every body who speaks kindly of your cousin, will certainly love Mrs Throckmorton, when you shall be told what she said of him, and that you *will* be told is equally certain, because it depends on Mrs

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Unwin. It is a very convenient thing to have a Mrs Unwin, who will tell you many a good long story for me, that I am not able to tell for myself. I am, however, not at all in arrear to our neighbours in the matter of admiration and esteem, but the more I know them, the more I like them, and have nearly an affection for them both. I am delighted that the Task has so large a share of the approbation of your sensible Suffolk friend.

I received yesterday from the General another letter of T. S. An unknown auxiliary having started up in my behalf, I believe I shall leave the business of answering to him, having no leisure myself for controversy. He lies very open to a very effectual reply.

My dearest cousin, adieu! I hope to write to you but once more before we meet. But oh, this coachmaker! and oh, this holiday week!

Yours, with impatient desire to see you, W. C.

222.—TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

HIS ENGAGEMENTS — CORRESPONDENCE — NONSENSE CLUB — THE CHANCELLOR.

OLNEY, *June* 9, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The little time that I can devote to any other purpose than that of poetry is, as you may suppose, stolen. Homer is urgent. Much is done, but much remains undone, and no schoolboy is more attentive to the performance of his daily task than I am. You will, therefore, excuse me, if at present I am both unfrequent and short.

The paper tells me that the Chancellor has relapsed, and I am truly sorry to hear it. The first attack was dangerous, but a second must be more formidable still. It is not probable that I should ever hear from him again if he survive; yet of the much that I should have felt for him, had our connection never been interrupted, I still feel much. Every body will feel the loss of a man whose abilities have made him of such general importance.

I correspond again with Colman, and upon the most friendly footing, and find in his instance, and in some others, that an intimate intercourse, which has been only casually suspended, not forfeited on either side by outrage, is capable not only of revival, but improvement.

I had a letter some time since from your sister Fanny, that gave me great pleasure. Such notices from old friends are

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always pleasant, and of such pleasures I have received many lately. They refresh the remembrance of early days, and make me young again. The noble institution of the Nonsense Club will be forgotten, when we are gone who composed it: but I often think of your most heroic line, written at one of our meetings, and especially think of it when I am translating Homer,—

To whom replied the Devil, yard-long tail'd.

There never was any thing more truly Grecian than that triple epithet, and were it possible to introduce it into either Iliad or Odyssey, I should certainly steal it. I am now flushed with expectation of Lady Hesketh, who spends the summer with us. We hope to see her next week. We have found admirable lodgings both for her and her suite, and a Quaker in this town, still more admirable than they, who, as if he loved her as much as I do, furnishes them for her with real elegance. W. C.

223.—TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

LADY HESKETH'S ARRIVAL.—WESTON.

OLNEY, *June* 19, 1786.

MY dear cousin's arrival has, as it could not fail to do, made us happier than we ever were at Olney. Her great kindness in giving us her company is a cordial that I shall feel the effect of, not only while she is here, but while I live.

Olney will not be much longer the place of our habitation. At a village two miles distant we have hired a house of Mr Throckmorton, a much better than we occupy at present, and yet not more expensive. It is situated very near to our most agreeable landlord, and his agreeable pleasure grounds. In him, and in his wife, we shall find such companions as will always make the time pass pleasantly while they are in the country, and his grounds will afford us good air, and good walking room in the winter,—two advantages which we have not enjoyed at Olney, where I have no neighbour with whom I can converse, and where, seven months in the year, I have been imprisoned by dirty and impassable ways, till both my health and Mrs Unwin's have suffered materially.

Homer is ever importunate, and will not suffer me to spend half the time with my distant friends that I would gladly give them. W. C.

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224. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

LADY HESKETH AT OLNEY—DESCRIPTION OF THEIR INTENDED RESIDENCE AT WESTON — COURSE OF LATIN READING FOR YOUTH.

OLNEY, *July* 3, 1786.

MY DEAR WILLIAM, — After a long silence I begin again. A day given to my friends, is a day taken from Homer, but to such an interruption, now and then occurring, I have no objection. Lady Hesketh is, as you observe, arrived, and has been with us near a fortnight. She pleases every body, and is pleased in her turn with every thing she finds at Olney; is always cheerful and sweet tempered, and knows no pleasure equal to that of communicating pleasure to us, and to all around her. This disposition in her is the more comfortable, because it is not the humour of the day, a sudden flash of benevolence and good spirits, occasioned merely by a change of scene, but it is her natural turn, and has governed all her conduct ever since I knew her first. We are consequently happy in her society, and shall be happier still to have you to partake with us in our joy. I am fond of the sound of bells, but was never more pleased with those of Olney than when they rang her into her new habitation. It is a compliment that our performers upon those instruments have never paid to any other personage (Lord Dartmouth excepted) since we knew the town. In short, she is, as she ever was, my pride and my joy, and I am delighted with every thing that means to do her honour. Her first appearance was too much for me; my spirits, instead of being gently raised, as I had inadvertently supposed they would be, broke down with me under the pressure of too much joy, and left me flat, or rather melancholy, throughout the day, to a degree that was mortifying to myself, and alarming to her. But I have made amends for this failure since, and in point of cheerfulness have far exceeded her expectations, for she knew that sable had been my suit for many years.

And now I shall communicate news that will give you pleasure. When you first contemplated the front of our abode, you were shocked. In your eyes it had the appearance of a prison, and you sighed at the thought that your mother lived in it. Your view of it was not only just, but prophetic. It had not only the aspect of a place built for the purposes of incarceration, but has actually served that purpose through a

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long, long period, and we have been the prisoners. But a jail-delivery is at hand: the bolts and bars are to be loosed, and we shall escape. A very different mansion, both in point of appearance and accommodation, expects us, and the expense of living in it not greater than we are subjected to in this. It is situated at Weston, one of the prettiest villages in England, and belongs to Mr Throckmorton. We all three dine with him to-day by invitation, and shall survey it in the afternoon, point out the necessary repairs, and finally adjust the treaty. I have my cousin's promise that she will never let another year pass without a visit to us; and the house is large enough to take us, and our suite, and her also, with as many of hers as she shall choose to bring. The change will, I hope, prove advantageous both to your mother and me, in all respects. Here we have no neighbourhood, there we shall have most agreeable neighbours in the Throckmortons. Here we have a bad air in winter, impregnated with the fishy smelling fumes of the marsh miasma; there we shall breathe in an atmosphere untainted. Here we are confined from September to March, and sometimes longer; there we shall be upon the very verge of pleasure grounds, in which we can always ramble, and shall not wade through almost impassable dirt to get at them. Both your mother's constitution and mine have suffered materially by such close and long confinement, and it is high time, unless we intend to retreat into the grave, that we should seek out a more wholesome residence. So far is well, the rest is left to Heaven.

I have hardly left myself room for an answer to your queries concerning my friend John, and his studies. I should recommend the civil war of Cæsar, because he wrote it who ranks, I believe, as the best writer, as well as soldier, of his day. There are books (I know not what they are, but you do, and can easily find them) that will inform him clearly of both the civil and military management of the Romans, the several officers, I mean, in both departments, and what was the peculiar province of each. The study of some such book would, I should think, prove a good introduction to that of Livy, unless you have a Livy with notes to that effect. A want of intelligence in those points has heretofore made the Roman history very dark and difficult to me; therefore I thus advise.— Yours ever, W. C.

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225. — TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

CORRECTIONS OF HIS VERSION — INADVERTENCIES IN THE ORIGINAL.

OLNEY, *July* 4, 1786.

I REJOICE, my dear friend, that you have at last received my proposals, and most cordially thank you for all your labours in my service. I have friends in the world who, knowing that I am apt to be careless when left to myself, are determined to watch over me with a jealous eye upon this occasion. The consequence will be, that the work will be better executed, but more tardy in the production. To them I owe it, that my translation, as fast as it proceeds, passes under the revisal of a most accurate discerner of all blemishes. I know not whether I told you before, or now tell you for the first time, that I am in the hands of a very extraordinary person. He is intimate with my bookseller, and voluntarily offered his service. I was at first doubtful whether to accept it or not; but finding that my friends above said were not to be satisfied on any other terms, though myself a perfect stranger to the man and his qualifications, except as he was recommended by Johnson, I at length consented, and have since found great reason to rejoice that I did. I called him an extraordinary person, and such he is. For he is not only versed in Homer, and accurate in his knowledge of the Greek to a degree that entitles him to that appellation, but, though a foreigner, is a perfect master of our language, and has exquisite taste in English poetry. By his assistance I have improved many passages, supplied many oversights, and corrected many mistakes, such as will of course escape the most diligent and attentive labourer in such a work. I ought to add, because it affords the best assurance of his zeal and fidelity, that he does not toil for hire, nor will accept of any premium, but has entered on this business merely for his amusement. In the last instance my sheets will pass through the hands of our old schoolfellow Colman, who has engaged to correct the press, and make any little alterations that he may see expedient. With all this precaution, little as I intended it once, I am now well satisfied. Experience has convinced me that other eyes than my own are necessary, in order that so long and arduous a task may be finished as it ought, and may neither discredit me, nor mortify and disappoint my friends. You, who I know interest yourself much

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and deeply in my success, will, I dare say, be satisfied with it too. Pope had many aids, and he who follows Pope ought not to walk alone.

Though I announce myself by my very undertaking to be one of Homer's most enraptured admirers, I am not a blind one. Perhaps the speech of Achilles given in my specimen, is, as you hint, rather too much in the moralizing strain, to suit so young a man, and of so much fire. But whether it be or not, in the course of the close application that I am forced to give to my author, I discover inadvertencies not a few; some perhaps that have escaped even the commentators themselves; or perhaps in the enthusiasm of their idolatry, they resolved that they should pass for beauties. Homer, however, say what they will, was man, and in all the works of man, especially in a work of such length and variety, many things will of necessity occur that might have been better. Pope and Addison had a Dennis;* and Dennis, if I mistake not, held up as he has been to scorn and detestation, was a sensible fellow, and passed some censures upon both those writers, that, had they been less just, would have hurt them less. Homer had his Zoilus; and perhaps if we knew all that Zoilus said, we should be forced to acknowledge, that sometimes at least he had reason on his side. But it is dangerous to find any fault at all with what the world is determined to esteem faultless.

I rejoice, my dear friend, that you enjoy some composure and cheerfulness of spirits: may God preserve and increase to you so great a blessing!— I am affectionately and truly yours, W. C.

226.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

DIFFICULTIES IN TRANSLATING THE NARRATIVE PORTIONS OF HOMER.

August 24, 1786.

My dear Friend,—I catch a minute by the tail and hold it fast while I write to you. The moment it is fled, I must go to breakfast. I am still occupied in refining and polishing, and shall this morning give the finishing hand to the seventh

* John Dennis, born in London, 1657, died, poor and blind, two years after Cowper's birth. He possessed more taste, talent, and learning, than the wit of Addison and Pope has left him credit for with posterity. Of Zoilus, the Grecian Dennis—both names having passed into a byeword, expressive of a captious fault finder—no authentic memorial exists.

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book. Fuseli * does me the honour to say, that the most difficult and most interesting parts of the poem are admirably rendered. But because he did not express himself equally pleased with the more pedestrian parts of it, my labour therefore has been principally given to the dignification of them; not but that I have retouched considerably, and made better still the best. In short, I hope to make it all of a piece, and shall exert myself to the utmost to secure that desirable point. A story-teller, so very circumstantial as Homer, must of necessity present us often with much matter in itself capable of no other embellishment than purity of diction and harmony of versification can give to it. *Hic labor, hoc opus est.* For our language, unless it be very severely chastised, has not the terseness, nor our measure the music of the Greek. But I shall not fail through want of industry.

We are likely to be very happy in our connection with the Throckmortons. His reserve and mine wear off; and he talks with great pleasure of the comfort that he proposes to himself from our winter evening conversations. His purpose seems to be, that we should spend them alternately with each other. Lady Hesketh transcribes for me at present. When she is gone, Mrs Throckmorton takes up that business, and will be my lady of the ink-bottle for the rest of the winter. She solicited herself that office. — Believe me, my dear William, truly yours, W. C.

Mr Throckmorton will (I doubt not) procure Lord Petre's name if he can, without any hint from me. He could not interest himself more in my success than he seems to do. Could he get the Pope to subscribe, I should have him; and should be glad of him and the whole Conclave.

227. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

PLEASURES OF RETROSPECTION.

My dear Friend, — You are my mahogany box, with a slip in the lid of it, to which I commit my productions of the lyric kind, in perfect confidence that they are safe, and will go no farther. All who are attached to the jingling art have this

* Henry Fuseli, celebrated as an artist of daring imagination, an able draughtsman, but bad colourist, and withal an eminent classical scholar, was born in 1739 at Zurich, where his father was a clergyman, and died in his apartments at the Royal Academy, 1825.

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peculiarity, that they would find no pleasure in the exercise, had they not one friend at least to whom they might publish what they have composed. If you approve my Latin, and your wife and sister my English, this, together with the approbation of your mother, is fame enough for me.

He who cannot look forward with comfort, must find what comfort he can in looking backward. Upon this principle, I the other day sent my imagination upon a trip thirty years behind me. She was very obedient, and very swift of foot, presently performed her journey, and at last set me down in the sixth form at Westminster. I fancied myself once more a schoolboy, a period of life in which, if I had never tasted true happiness, I was at least equally unacquainted with its contrary. No manufacturer of waking dreams ever succeeded better in his employment than I do. I can weave such a piece of tapestry in a few minutes, as not only has all the charms of reality, but is embellished also with a variety of beauties which, though they never existed, are more captivating than any that ever did—accordingly I was a schoolboy in high favour with the master, received a silver groat for my exercise, and had the pleasure of seeing it sent from form to form, for the admiration of all who were able to understand it. Do you wish to see this highly applauded performance? It follows on the other side.

Torn off.

228.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

HIS POETRY USUALLY THE REVERSE OF HIS STATE OF MIND—VERSES ENCLOSED.

My dear William,—You are sometimes indebted to bad weather, but more frequently to a dejected state of mind, for my punctuality as a correspondent. This was the case when I composed that tragi-comic ditty for which you thank me; my spirits were exceeding low, and having no fool or jester at hand, I resolved to be my own. The end was answered,—I laughed myself, and I made you laugh. Sometimes I pour out my thoughts in a mournful strain, but those sable effusions your mother will not suffer me to send you, being resolved that nobody shall share with me the burden of my melancholy but herself. In general you may suppose that I am remarkably sad when I seem remarkably merry. The effort we make to get rid of a load is usually violent in pro-

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portion to the weight of it. I have seen at Sadler's Wells a tight little fellow dancing with a fat man upon his shoulders; to those who looked at him, he seemed insensible of the encumbrance, but if a physician had felt his pulse when the feat was over, I suppose he would have found the effect of it there. Perhaps you remember the undertakers' dance in the Rehearsal, which they perform in crape hat-bands and black cloaks, to the tune of "Hob or Nob," one of the sprightliest airs in the world. Such is my fiddling, and such is my dancing; but they serve a purpose which at some certain times could not be so effectually promoted by any thing else.

I have endeavoured to comply with your request, though I am not good at writing upon a given subject. Your mother, however, comforts me by her approbation, and I steer myself in all that I produce by her judgment. If she does not understand me at the first reading, I am sure the lines are obscure, and always alter them; if she laughs, I know it is not without reason; and if she says, "That 's well, it will do,"—I have no fear lest any body else should find fault with it.' She is my lord chamberlain, who licenses all I write.

TO MISS C———

ON HER BIRTH-DAY.

How many between east and west
Disgrace their parent earth,
Whose deeds constrain us to detest
The day that gave them birth!

Not so when Stella's natal morn
Revolving months restore,
We can rejoice that she was born,
And wish her born once more!

If you like it, use it. If not, you know the remedy. It is serious, yet epigrammatic — like a bishop at a ball!

W. C.

229. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

DECLINES TO WRITE AGAINST LEGAL OATHS AND TRAVELLING ON SUNDAY — HIS REASONS.

My dear Friend, — I am sensibly mortified at finding myself obliged to disappoint you; but though I have had many thoughts upon the subjects you propose to my consideration, I have had none that have been favourable to the

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undertaking. I applaud your purpose, for the sake of the principle from which it springs; but I look upon the evils you mean to animadvert upon, as too obstinate and inveterate ever to be expelled by the means you mention. The very persons to whom you would address your remonstrance, are themselves sufficiently aware of their enormity; years ago, to my knowledge, they were frequently the topics of conversation at polite tables; they have been frequently mentioned in both houses of parliament; and I suppose there is hardly a member of either, who would not immediately assent to the necessity of a reformation, were it proposed to him in a reasonable way. But there it stops; and there it will for ever stop, till the majority are animated with a zeal in which they are at present deplorably defective. A religious man is unfeignedly shocked, when he reflects upon the prevalence of such crimes; a moral man must needs be so in a degree, and will affect to be much more so than he is. But how many do you suppose there are among our worthy representatives, that come under either of these descriptions? If all were such, yet to new-model the police of the country, which must be done in order to make even unavoidable perjury less frequent, were a task they would hardly undertake, on account of the great difficulty that would attend it. Government is too much interested in the consumption of malt liquor, to reduce the number of venders. Such plausible pleas may be offered in defence of travelling on Sundays, especially by the trading part of the world, as the whole bench of bishops would find it difficult to overrule. And with respect to the violation of oaths, till a certain name is more generally respected than it is at present, however such persons as yourself may be grieved at it, the legislature are never likely to lay it to heart. I do not mean, nor would by any means attempt, to discourage you in so laudable an enterprise; but such is the light in which it appears to me, that I do not feel the least spark of courage qualifying or prompting me to embark in it myself. An exhortation therefore written by me — by hopeless desponding me — would be flat, insipid, and uninteresting; and disgrace the cause, instead of serving it. If after what I have said, however, you still retain the same sentiments, *Macte esto virtute tud*, there is nobody better qualified than yourself, and may your success prove that I despaired of it without a reason. — Adieu, my dear friend,

W. C.

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230. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

LETTER-WRITING — A SIMILE IN RHYME — STATE OF THE NATION.

My dear Friend, — I write under the impression of a difficulty not easily surmounted, — the want of something to say. Letter-spinning is generally more entertaining to the writer than the reader; for your sake therefore I would avoid it, but a dearth of materials is very apt to betray one into a trifling strain, in spite of all our endeavours to be serious.

I left off on Saturday; this present being Monday morning, I renew the attempt, in hopes that I may possibly catch some subject by the end, and be more successful.

So have I seen the maids in vain
Tumble and tease a tangled skein;
They bite the lip, and scratch the head,
And cry, "The deuce is in the thread!"
They torture it, and jerk it round,
Till the right end at last is found,
Then wind, and wind, and wind away,
And what was work is changed to play.

When I wrote the two first lines, I thought I had engaged in a hazardous enterprise; for, thought I, should my poetical vein be as dry as my prosaic, I shall spoil the sheet, and send nothing at all; for I could on no account endure the thought of beginning again. But I think I have succeeded to admiration, and am willing to flatter myself that I have even seen a worse impromptu in the newspapers.

Though we live in a nook, and the world is quite unconscious that there are any such beings in it as ourselves, yet we are not unconcerned about what passes in it. The present awful crisis, big with the fate of England, engages much of our attention. The action is probably over by this time, and though we know it not, the grand question is decided, whether the war shall roar in our once peaceful fields, or whether we shall still only hear of it at a distance. I can compare the nation to no similitude more apt, than that of an ancient castle that had been for days assaulted by the battering ram. It was long before the stroke of that engine made any sensible impression, but the continual repetition at length communicated a slight tremor to the wall; the next, and the next, and the next blow increased it. Another shock puts the whole mass in motion, from the top to the foundation: it bends

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forward, and is every moment driven farther from the perpendicular; till at last the decisive blow is given, and down it comes. Every million that has been raised within the last century, has had an effect upon the constitution like that of a blow from the aforesaid ram upon the aforesaid wall. The impulse becomes more and more important, and the impression it makes is continually augmented; unless therefore something extraordinary intervenes to prevent it——you will find the consequence at the end of my simile.* — Yours, W. C.

291. — TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

NOTE ENCLOSING "THE LILY AND THE ROSE."

As I promised you verse, if you would send me a frank, I am not willing to return the cover without some, though I think I have already wearied you by the prolixity of my prose.

THE LILY AND THE ROSE.

THE nymph must lose her female friend,
If more admired than she;
But where will fierce contention end,
If flowers can disagree?

Within the garden's peaceful scene
Appear'd two lovely foes,
Aspiring to the rank of queen, —
The Lily and the Rose.

The Rose soon redden'd into rage,
And, swelling with disdain,
Appeal'd to many a poet's page,
To prove her right to reign.

The Lily's height bespoke command —
A fair imperial flower,
She seem'd design'd for Flora's hand,
The sceptre of her power.

This civil bick'ring and debate
The goddess chanced to hear,
And flew to save, ere yet too late,
The pride of the parterre.

Yours is, she said, the nobler hue,
And yours the statelier mien;
And, till a third surpasses you,
Let each be deem'd a queen.

* Alluding to the financial measures of the Pitt administration.

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Thus soothed and reconciled, each seeks
The fairest British fair;
The seat of empire is her cheeks,
They reign united there.

I must refer you to those unaccountable gaddings and caprices of the human mind, for the cause of this production; for in general, I believe, there is no man who has less to do with the ladies' cheeks than I have. I suppose it would be best to antedate it, and to imagine that it was written twenty years ago, for my mind was never more in a trifling butterfly trim than when I composed it, even in the earliest parts of my life. And what is worse than all this, I have translated it into Latin. But that some other time.—Yours,

W. C.

232.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

CHARACTER OF CHURCHILL AS A POET.

My dear William,—How apt we are to deceive ourselves where self is in question! You say I am in your debt, and I accounted you in mine,—a mistake to which you must attribute my arrears, if indeed I owe you any, for I am not backward to write where the uppermost thought is welcome.

I am obliged to you for all the books you have occasionally furnished me with. I did not, indeed, read many of Johnson's Classics—those of established reputation are so fresh in my memory, though many years have intervened since I made them my companions, that it was like reading what I read yesterday over again: and as to the minor Classics, I did not think them worth reading at all—I tasted most of them, and did not like them—it is a great thing to be indeed a poet, and does not happen to more than one man in a century. Churchill, the great Churchill, deserved the name of poet—I have read him twice, and some of his pieces three times over, and the last time with more pleasure than the first. The pitiful scribbler of his life seems to have undertaken that task, for which he was entirely unqualified, merely because it afforded him an opportunity to traduce him. He has inserted in it but one anecdote of consequence, for which he refers you to a novel, and introduces the story with doubts about the truth of it. But his barrenness as a biographer I could forgive, if the simpleton had not thought himself a judge of his writings, and, under the erroneous influence of that thought,

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informed his reader that Gotham, Independence, and the Times, were catchpennies. Gotham, unless I am a greater blockhead than he, which I am far from believing, is a noble and beautiful poem, and a poem with which I make no doubt the author took as much pains as with any he ever wrote. Making allowance (and Dryden in his Absalom and Achitophel stands in need of the same indulgence) for an unwarrantable use of Scripture, it appears to me to be a masterly performance. Independence is a most animated piece, full of strength and spirit, and marked with that bold masculine character which I think is the great peculiarity of this writer. And the Times (except that the subject is disgusting to the last degree) stands equally high in my opinion. He is indeed a careless writer for the most part; but where shall we find in any of those authors who finish their works with the exactness of a Flemish pencil, those bold and daring strokes of fancy, those numbers so hazardously ventured upon, and so happily finished, the matter so compressed, and yet so clear, and the colouring so sparingly laid on, and yet with such a beautiful effect? In short, it is not his least praise that he is never guilty of those faults as a writer, which he lays to the charge of others: a proof that he did not judge by a borrowed standard, or from rules laid down by critics, but that he was qualified to do it by his own native powers, and his great superiority of genius. For he that wrote so much, and so fast, would through inadvertence and hurry unavoidably have departed from rules which he might have found in books, but his own truly poetical talent was a guide which could not suffer him to err. A race-horse is graceful in his swiftest pace, and never makes an awkward motion though he is pushed to his utmost speed. A cart-horse might perhaps be taught to play tricks in the riding school, and might prance and curvet like his betters, but at some unlucky time would be sure to betray the baseness of his original. It is an affair of very little consequence perhaps to the well-being of mankind, but I cannot help regretting that he died so soon. Those words of Virgil, upon the immature death of Marcellus, might serve for his epitaph:

> Ostendent terris hunc tantum fata, neque ultra
> Esse sinent ——. *

Yours, W. C.

* The literary justness of these remarks is more than questionable. Churchill is certainly vigorous in satire; but, stripped of this, his poetry is

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233.—TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

SOME ACCOUNTS OF HIS EARLIEST ATTEMPTS IN VERSE.

My dear William,—I find the Register in all respects an entertaining medley, but especially in this, that it has brought to my view some long forgotten pieces of my own production. I mean, by the way, two or three. Those I have marked with my own initials, and you may be sure I found them peculiarly agreeable, as they had not only the grace of being mine, but that of novelty likewise to recommend them. It is at least twenty years since I saw them. You, I think, was never a dabbler in rhyme. I have been one ever since I was fourteen years of age, when I began with translating an elegy of Tibullus. I have no more right to the name of a poet, than a maker of mouse-traps has to that of an engineer, but my little exploits in this way have at times amused me so much, that I have often wished myself a good one. Such a talent in verse as mine is like a child's rattle, very entertaining to the trifler that uses it, and very disagreeable to all beside. But it has served to rid me of some melancholy moments; for I only take it up as a gentleman performer does his fiddle. I have this peculiarity belonging to me as a rhymist, that though I am charmed to a great degree with my own work, while it is on the anvil, I can seldom bear to look at it when it is once finished. The more I contemplate it, the more it loses its value, till I am at last disgusted with it. I then throw it by, take it up again perhaps ten years after, and am as much delighted with it as at the first.

Few people have the art of being agreeable when they talk of themselves; if you are not weary, therefore, you pay me a high compliment.

I dare say Miss S —— was much diverted with the conjecture of her friends. The true key to the pleasure she found at Olney was plain enough to be seen, but they chose to

flat enough, and the construction of his verse careless and rugged. It is more than surprising, however, to find Cowper attempting to defend the character of a low debauchee, who first disgraced, and then recklessly threw aside, the sacred profession. Such is the power of early friendship even over good minds.

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overlook it. She brought with her a disposition to be pleased, which whoever does is sure to find a visit agreeable, because they made it so. — Yours, W. C. *

234. — TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

MILTONIC BLANK VERSE — HOMER.

OLNEY, *August* 31, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — I began to fear for your health, and every day said to myself, — I must write to Bagot soon, if it be only to ask him how he does — a measure that I should certainly have pursued long since, had I been less absorbed in Homer than I am. But such are my engagements in that quarter, that they make me, I think, good for little else.

Many thanks, my friend, for the names that you have sent me. The Bagots will make a most conspicuous figure among my subscribers, and I shall not, I hope, soon forget my obligations to them.

The unacquaintedness of modern ears with the divine harmony of Milton's numbers, and the principles upon which he constructed them, is the cause of the quarrel that they have with elisions in blank verse. But where is the remedy? In vain should you or I, and a few hundreds more, perhaps, who have studied his versification, tell them of the superior majesty of it, and that for that majesty it is greatly indebted to those elisions. In their ears, they are discord and dissonance; they lengthen the line beyond its due limits, and are therefore not to be endured. There is a whimsical inconsistence in the judgment of modern readers in this particular. Ask them all round, whom do you account the best writer of blank verse? and they will reply to a man, "Milton, to be sure; Milton against the field!" Yet if a writer of the present day should construct his numbers exactly upon Milton's plan, not one in fifty of these professed admirers of Milton would endure him. The case standing thus, what is to be done?

* This dateless letter, which is probably entitled to a very early place in this collection, was reserved to close the correspondence with Mr Unwin, from the hope, that before the press advanced so far, the editor might recover those unknown verses of Cowper, to which the letter alludes, but all researches for this purpose have failed. — HAYLEY.

I have fruitlessly made the same attempt, by turning over all the Annual Registers in which any thing of Cowper's was likely to be found. — J. S. M.

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An author must either be contented to give disgust to the generality, or he must humour them by sinning against his own judgment. This latter course, so far as elisions are concerned, I have adopted as essential to my success. In every other respect I give as much variety in my measure as I can, I believe I may say as in ten syllables it is possible to give, shifting perpetually the pause and cadence, and accounting myself happy that modern refinement has not yet enacted laws against this also. If it had, I protest to you I would have dropped my design of translating Homer entirely; and with what an indignant stateliness of reluctance I make them the concession that I have mentioned, Mrs Unwin can witness, who hears all my complaints upon the subject.

After having lived twenty years at Olney, we are on the point of leaving it, but shall not migrate far. We have taken a house in the village of Weston. Lady Hesketh is our good angel, by whose aid we are enabled to pass into a better air, and a more walkable country. The imprisonment that we have suffered here for so many winters, has hurt us both. That we may suffer it no longer, she stoops to Olney, lifts us from our swamp, and sets us down on the elevated grounds of Weston Underwood. There, my dear friend, I shall be happy to see you, and to thank you in person for all your kindness.

I do not wonder at the judgment that you form of———, a foreigner; but you may assure yourself that, foreigner as he is, he has an exquisite taste in English verse. The man is all fire, and an enthusiast in the highest degree on the subject of Homer, and has given me more than once a jog, when I have been inclined to nap with my author. No cold water is to be feared from him that might abate my own fire, rather perhaps too much combustible.—Adieu! mon ami, yours faithfully, W. C.

235.—TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

ADVENTURE OF A MANUSCRIPT OF TRANSLATION.

OLNEY, *October* 6, 1786.

You have not heard, I suppose, that the ninth book of my translation is at the bottom of the Thames. But it is even so. A storm overtook it in its way to Kingston, and it sunk, together with the whole cargo of the boat in which it was a

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passenger. Not figuratively foreshewing, I hope, by its submersion, the fate of all the rest. My kind and generous cousin, who leaves nothing undone that she thinks can conduce to my comfort, encouragement, or convenience, is my transcriber also. *She* wrote the copy, and *she* will have to write it again,—*Hers*, therefore, is the damage. I have a thousand reasons to lament that the time approaches when we must lose her. She has made a winterly summer a most delightful one, but the winter itself we must spend without her. W. C.*

286.—TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

ANNOUNCING HIS REMOVAL TO WESTON UNDERWOOD.

WESTON UNDERWOOD, *November* 17, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—There are some things that do not actually shorten the life of man, yet seem to do so, and frequent removals from place to place are of that number. For my own part at least, I am apt to think, if I had been more stationary, I should seem to myself to have lived longer. My many changes of habitation have divided my time into many short periods, and when I look back upon them they appear only as the stages in a day's journey, the first of which is at no very great distance from the last.

I lived longer at Olney than any where. There, indeed, I lived till mouldering walls and a tottering house warned me to depart. I have accordingly taken the hint, and two days since arrived, or rather took up my abode, at Weston. You perhaps have never made the experiment, but I can assure you that the confusion which attends a transmigration of this kind is infinite, and has a terrible effect in deranging the intellects. I have been obliged to renounce my Homer on the occasion, and though not for many days, I yet feel as if study and meditation, so long my confirmed habits, were on a sudden become impracticable, and that I shall certainly find them so when I attempt them again. But in a scene so much quieter and pleasanter than that which I have just escaped from, in a house so much more commodious, and with furniture about me so much more to my taste, I shall hope to

* In this interval, namely, on the 15th of the following month, (O. S.) the day on which he completed his fifty-fifth year, Cowper removed to Weston Underwood.

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recover my literary tendency again, when once the bustle of the occasion shall have subsided.

How glad I should be to receive you under a roof, where you would find me so much more comfortably accommodated than at Olney! I know your warmth of heart toward me, and am sure that you would rejoice in my joy. At present, indeed, I have not had time for much self-gratulation, but have every reason to hope, nevertheless, that in due time I shall derive considerable advantage, both in health and spirits, from the alteration made in my *whereabout*.

I have now the twelfth book of the Iliad in hand, having settled the eleven first books finally, as I think, or nearly so. The winter is the time when I make the greatest riddance.

Adieu, my friend Walter. Let me hear from you, and believe me ever yours, W. C.

237.—TO LADY HESKETH.

HIS BIRTHDAY—COMFORTS AND THE SCENERY OF WESTON.

WESTON LODGE, *November* 26, 1786.

IT is my birthday, my beloved Cousin, and I determine to employ a part of it, that it may not be destitute of festivity, in writing to you. The dark, thick fog that has obscured it, would have been a burden to me at Olney, but here I have hardly attended to it. The neatness and snugness of our abode compensate all the dreariness of the season, and whether the ways are wet or dry, our house at least is always warm and commodious. O! for you, my cousin, to partake these comforts with us! I will not begin already to tease you upon that subject, but Mrs Unwin remembers to have heard from your own lips, that you hate London in the spring. Perhaps, therefore, by that time you may be glad to escape from a scene which will be every day growing more disagreeable, that you may enjoy the comforts of the Lodge. You well know that the best house has a desolate appearance unfurnished. This house accordingly, since it has been occupied by us and our *meubles*, is as much superior to what it was when you saw it, as you can imagine. The parlour is even elegant. When I say that the parlour is elegant, I do not mean to insinuate that the study is not so. It is neat, warm, and silent, and a much better study than I deserve, if I do not produce in it an incomparable translation of Homer. I think every day

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of those lines of Milton, and congratulate myself on having obtained, before I am quite superannuated, what he seems not to have hoped for sooner:

> And may at length my weary age
> Find out the peaceful hermitage.

For if it is not a hermitage, at least it is a much better thing; and you must always understand, my dear, that when poets talk of cottages, hermitages, and such like things, they mean a house with six sashes in front, two comfortable parlours, a smart staircase, and three bedchambers of convenient dimensions; in short, exactly such a house as this.

The Throckmortons continue the most obliging neighbours in the world. One morning last week, they both went with me to the Cliffs—a scene, my dear, in which you would delight beyond measure, but which you cannot visit except in the spring or autumn. The heat of summer, and the clinging dirt of winter would destroy you. What is called the Cliff, is no cliff, nor at all like one, but a beautiful terrace, sloping gently down to the Ouse, and from the brow of which, though not lofty, you have a view of such a valley as makes that which you see from the hills near Olney, and which I have had the honour to celebrate, an affair of no consideration.

Wintry as the weather is, do not suspect that it confines me. I ramble daily, and every day change my ramble. Wherever I go, I find short grass under my feet, and when I have travelled perhaps five miles, come home with shoes not at all too dirty for a drawing room. I was pacing yesterday under the elms that surround the field in which stands the great alcove, when, lifting my eyes, I saw two black genteel figures bolt through a hedge into the path where I was walking. You guess already who they were, and that they could be nobody but our neighbours. They had seen me from a hill at a distance, and had traversed a great turnip-field to get to me. You see, therefore, my dear, that I am in some request. Alas! in too much request with some people. The verses of Cadwallader have found me at last.

I am charmed with your account of our little cousin * at Kensington. If the world does not spoil him hereafter, he will be a valuable man.—Good night, and may God bless thee! W. C.

* Lord Cowper.

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238. — TO LADY HESKETH.

ON THE DEATH OF MR UNWIN — HIS CHARACTER — ASSURANCE OF HIS HAPPINESS.

THE LODGE, *December* 4, 1786.

I SENT you, my dear, a melancholy letter, and I do not know that I shall now send you one very unlike it. Not that any thing occurs in consequence of our late loss more afflictive than was to be expected, but the mind does not perfectly recover its tone after a shock like that which has been felt so lately. This I observe, that though my experience has long since taught me, that this world is a world of shadows, and that it is the more prudent, as well as the more Christian course, to possess the comforts that we find in it as if we possessed them not, it is no easy matter to reduce this doctrine into practice. We forget that that God who gave them, may, when he pleases, take them away; and that perhaps it may please him to take them at a time when we least expect, or are least disposed to part from them. Thus it has happened in the present case. There never was a moment in Unwin's life, when there seemed to be more urgent want of him than the moment in which he died. He had attained to an age when, if they are at any time useful, men become more useful to their families, their friends, and the world. His parish began to feel, and to be sensible of the advantages of his ministry. The clergy around him were many of them awed by his example. His children were thriving under his own tuition and management, and his eldest boy is likely to feel his loss severely, being by his years in some respect qualified to understand the value of such a parent; by his literary proficiency too clever for a schoolboy, and too young at the same time for the university. The removal of a man in the prime of life, of such a character, and with such connections, seems to make a void in society that can never be filled. God seemed to have made him just what he was, that he might be a blessing to others, and when the influence of his character and abilities began to be felt, removed him. These are mysteries, my dear, that we cannot contemplate without astonishment, but which will nevertheless be explained hereafter, and must in the meantime be revered in silence. It is well for his mother, that she has spent her life in the practice of an habitual acquiescence in the dispensations of Providence,

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else I know that this stroke would have been heavier, after all that she has suffered upon another account, than she could have borne. She derives, as she well may, great consolation from the thought that he lived the life, and died the death of a Christian. The consequence is, if possible, more unavoidable than the most mathematical conclusion, that therefore he is happy. So farewell, my friend Unwin! The first man for whom I conceived a friendship after my removal from St Albans, and for whom I cannot but still continue to feel a friendship, though I shall see thee with these eyes no more. W. C.

239.—TO ROBERT SMITH, ESQ.*

THE SAME SUBJECT.

'WESTON UNDERWOOD, near OLNEY,
December 9, 1786.

MY DEAR SIR,—We have indeed suffered a great loss by the death of our friend Unwin; and the shock that attended it was the more severe, as till within a few hours of his decease there seemed to be no very alarming symptoms. All the account that we received from Mr Henry Thornton, who acted like a true friend on the occasion, and with a tenderness toward all concerned that does him great honour, encouraged our hopes of his recovery; and Mrs Unwin herself found him on her arrival at Winchester so cheerful, and in appearance so likely to live, that her letter also seemed to promise us all that we could wish on the subject. But an unexpected turn in his distemper, which suddenly seized his bowels, dashed all our hopes, and deprived us almost immediately of a man whom we must ever regret. His mind having been from his infancy deeply tinctured with religious sentiments, he was always impressed with a sense of the importance of the great change of all; and on former occasions, when at any time he found himself indisposed, was consequently subject to distressing alarms and apprehensions. But in this last instance, his mind was from the first composed and easy; his fears were taken away, and succeeded by such a resignation as warrants us in saying, "that God made all his bed in his sickness." I believe it is always thus, where the heart, though upright toward God, as Unwin's assuredly was, is yet troubled with the fear of death. When death indeed comes, he is either welcome, or at least has lost his sting.

* Afterwards Lord Carrington.

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I have known many such instances, and his mother, from the moment that she learned with what tranquillity he was favoured in his illness, for that very reason expected that it would be his last. Yet not with so much certainty, but that the favourable accounts of him at length, in a great measure, superseded that persuasion.

She begs me to assure you, my dear sir, how sensible she is, as well as myself, of the kindness of your inquiries. She suffers this stroke, not with more patience and submission than I expected, for I never knew her hurried by any affliction into the loss of either, but, in appearance at least, and at present, with less injury to her health than I apprehended. She observed to me, after reading your kind letter, that, though it was a proof of the greatness of her loss, it yet afforded her pleasure, though a melancholy one, to see how much her son had been loved and valued by such a person as yourself.

Mrs Unwin wrote to her daughter-in-law, to invite her and the family hither, hoping that a change of scene, and a situation so pleasant as this, may be of service to her, but we have not yet received her answer. I have good hope, however, that, great as her affliction must be, she will yet be able to support it, for she well knows whither to resort for consolation.

The virtues and amiable qualities of our friends are the things for which we most wish to keep them, but they are, on the other hand, the very things that in particular ought to reconcile us to their departure. We find ourselves sometimes connected with, and engaged in affection too, to a person of whose readiness and fitness for another life we cannot have the highest opinion. The death of such men has a bitterness in it, both to themselves and survivors, which, thank God! is not to be found in the death of Unwin.

I know, my dear sir, how much you valued him, and I know, also, how much he valued you. With respect to him, all is well; and of you, if I should survive you, which, perhaps, is not very probable, I shall say the same.

In the meantime, believe me, with the warmest wishes for your health and happiness, and with Mrs Unwin's affectionate respects, yours, my dear sir, most faithfully, W. C.

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240—TO LADY HESKETH.

MR UNWIN'S DEATH, AS AFFECTING THE EDUCATION OF LORD COWPER.

WESTON, *December* 9, 1786.

I AM perfectly sure that you are mistaken, though I do not wonder at it, considering the singular nature of the event, in the judgment that you form of poor Unwin's death, as it affects the interest of his intended pupil. When a tutor was wanted for him, you sought out the wisest and best man for the office within the circle of your connections It pleased God to take him home to himself. Men eminently wise and good are very apt to die, because they are fit to do so. You found in Unwin a man worthy to succeed him; and He, in whose hands are the issues of life and death, seeing, no doubt, that Unwin was ripe for a removal into a better state, removed him also. The matter, viewed in this light, seems not so wonderful as to refuse all explanation, except such as in a melancholy moment you have given to it. And I am so convinced that the little boy's destiny had no influence at all in hastening the death of his tutors elect, that, were it not impossible, on more accounts than one, that I should be able to serve him in that capacity, I would, without the least fear of dying a moment sooner, offer myself to that office; I would even do it, were I conscious of the same fitness for another and a better state, that I believe them to have been both endowed with. In that case, I, perhaps, might die too, but if I should, it would not be on account of that connection. Neither, my dear, had your interference in the business any thing to do with the catastrophe. Your whole conduct in it must have been acceptable in the sight of God, as it was directed by principles of the purest benevolence.

I have not touched Homer to-day. Yesterday was one of my terrible seasons, and when I arose this morning, I found that I had not sufficiently recovered myself to engage in such an occupation. Having letters to write, I the more willingly gave myself a dispensation.—Good night. Yours ever,

W. C.

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241. — TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

ACCOUNT OF MR UNWIN'S LAST ILLNESS.

WESTON, *December* 9, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — We had just begun to enjoy the pleasantness of our new situation, to find at least as much comfort in it as the season of the year would permit, when affliction found us out in our retreat, and the news reached us of the death of Mr Unwin. He had taken a western tour with Mr Henry Thornton, and, in his return, at Winchester, was seized with a putrid fever, which sent him to his grave. He is gone to it, however, though young, as fit for it as age itself could have made him. Regretted, indeed, and always to be regretted by those who knew him, for he had every thing that makes a man valuable both in his principles and in his manners, but leaving still this consolation to his surviving friends, that he was desirable in this world chiefly because he was so well prepared for a better.

I find myself here situated exactly to my mind. Weston is one of the prettiest villages in England, and the walks about it at all seasons of the year delightful. I know that you will rejoice with me in the change that we have made, and for which I am altogether indebted to Lady Hesketh. It is a change as great as (to compare metropolitan things with rural) from St Giles's to Grosvenor Square. Our house is, in all respects, commodious, and in some degree elegant; and I cannot give you a better idea of that which we have left, than by telling you the present candidates for it are a publican and a shoemaker. W. C.

242. — TO LADY HESKETH.

ADVANCE OF PRAISE LIKE THAT OF MONEY.

WESTON, *December* 21, 1786.

YOUR welcome letter, my beloved cousin, which ought by the date to have arrived on Sunday, being by some untoward accident delayed, came not till yesterday. It came, however, and has relieved me from a thousand distressing apprehensions on your account.

The dew of your intelligence has refreshed my poetical laurels. A little praise now and then is very good for your

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hard-working poet, who is apt to grow languid and perhaps careless without it. Praise, I find, affects us as money does. The more a man gets of it, with the more vigilance he watches over and preserves it. Such, at least, is its effect on me, and you may assure yourself that I will never lose a mite of it for want of care.

I have already invited the good Padre in general terms, and he shall positively dine here next week, whether he will or not. I do not at all suspect that his kindness to Protestants has any thing insidious in it, any more than I suspect that he transcribes Homer for me with a view for my conversion. He would find me a tough piece of business I can tell him; for when I had no religion at all, I had yet a terrible dread of the Pope. How much more now!

I should have sent you a longer letter, but was obliged to devote my last evening to the melancholy employment of composing a Latin inscription for the tombstone of poor William, two copies of which I wrote out and enclosed, one to Henry Thornton, and one to Mr Newton. Homer stands by me biting his thumbs, and swears, that if I do not leave off directly, he will choke me with bristly Greek, that shall stick in my throat for ever. W. C.

243. — TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

TEDIOUSNESS OF HOMER'S BATTLES — SUCCESS OF THE POET'S TWO FORMER VOLUMES.

WESTON, *January* 8, 1787.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — You wish to hear from me at any calm interval of epic frenzy. An interval presents itself, but whether calm or not, is perhaps doubtful. Is it possible for a man to be calm, who, for three weeks past, has been perpetually occupied in slaughter: letting out one man's bowels, smiting another through the gullet, transfixing the liver of another, and lodging an arrow in the buttock of a fourth? Read the thirteenth book of the Iliad, and you will find such amusing incidents as these the subject of it, the sole subject. In order to interest myself in it, and to catch the spirit of it, I had need discard all humanity. It is woful work; and were the best poet in the world to give us at this day such a list of killed and wounded, he would not escape universal censure,—to the praise of a more enlightened age be it spoken. I have waded through much blood, and through

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much more I must wade before I shall have finished. I determine, in the meantime, to account it all very sublime, and for two reasons,—First, because all the learned think so, and secondly, because I am to translate it. But were I an indifferent by-stander, perhaps I should venture to wish, that Homer had applied his wonderful powers to a less disgusting subject. He has in the Odyssey, and I long to get at it.

I have not the good fortune to meet with any of these fine things, that you say are printed in my praise. But I learn, from certain advertisements in the Morning Herald, that I make a conspicuous figure in the entertainments of Free Mason's Hall. I learn, also, that my volumes are out of print, and that a third edition is soon to be published. But if I am not gratified with the sight of odes composed to my honour and glory, I have at least been tickled with some *douceurs* of a very flattering nature by the post. A lady unknown addresses the best of men—an unknown gentleman has read my inimitable poems, and invites me to his seat in Hampshire—another incognito gives me hopes of a memorial in his garden—and a Welsh attorney sends me his verses to revise, and obligingly asks,

> Say, shall my little bark attendant sail,
> Pursue the triumph, and partake the gale?

If you find me a little vain hereafter, my friend, you must excuse it in consideration of these powerful incentives, especially the latter; for surely the poet who can charm an attorney, especially a Welsh one, must be at least an Orpheus, if not something greater.

Mrs Unwin is as much delighted as myself with our present situation. But it is a sort of April weather life that we lead in this world. A little sunshine is generally the prelude to a storm. Hardly had we begun to enjoy the change, when the death of her son cast a gloom upon every thing. He was a most exemplary man; of your order; learned, polite, and amiable. The father of lovely children, and the husband of a wife (very much like dear Mrs Bagot) who adored him. Adieu, my friend! Your affectionate W. C.

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244. — TO LADY HESKETH.

INDISPOSITION — PROGRESS IN HOMER — A LADY CLAIMS HIS POEM OF THE ROSE.

THE LODGE, *January* 8, 1787.

I HAVE had a little nervous fever lately, my dear, that has somewhat abridged my sleep; and, though I find myself better to-day than I have been since it seized me, yet I feel my head lightish, and not in the best order for writing. You will find me, therefore, perhaps not only less alert in my manner than I usually am when my spirits are good, but rather shorter. I will, however, proceed to scribble till I find that it fatigues me, and then will do as I know you would bid me do were you here,—shut up my desk and take a walk.

The good General tells me, that in the eight first books which I have sent him, he still finds alterations and amendments necessary, of which I myself am equally persuaded; and he asks my leave to lay them before an intimate friend of his, of whom he gives a character that bespeaks him highly deserving such a trust. To this I have no objection, desiring only to make the translation as perfect as I can make it. If God grant me life and health, I would spare no labour to secure that point. The General's letter is extremely kind, and, both for matter and manner, like all the rest of his dealings with his cousin the poet.

I had a letter also yesterday from Mr Smith, member for Nottingham.* Though we never saw each other, he writes to me in the most friendly terms, and interests himself much in my Homer, and in the success of my subscription. Speaking on this latter subject, he says that my poems are read by hundreds, who know nothing of my proposals, and makes no doubt that they would subscribe, if they did. I have myself always thought them imperfectly, or rather insufficiently, announced.

I could pity the poor woman, who has been weak enough to claim my song. Such pilferings are sure to be detected. I wrote it, I know not how long, but I suppose four years ago. The Rose in question was a Rose given to Lady Austen by Mrs Unwin, and the incident that suggested the subject occurred in the room in which you slept at the

* Lord Carrington.

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vicarage, which Lady Austen made her dining-room. Some time since, Mr Bull going to London, I gave him a copy of it, which he undertook to convey to Nichols, the printer of the Gentleman's Magazine. He shewed it to a Mrs C———, who begged to copy it, and promised to send it to the printer's by her servant. Three or four months afterwards, and when I had concluded it was lost, I saw it in the Gentleman's Magazine, with my signature, W. C. Poor simpleton! She will find now, perhaps, that the Rose had a thorn, and that she has pricked her fingers with it. Adieu! my beloved cousin.

W. C.

245.—TO LADY HESKETH.

DREAMS MAY BE DIVINE COMMUNICATIONS IN PARTICULAR INSTANCES—INTRODUCTION OF MR ROSE.

THE LODGE, *January* 18, 1787.

I HAVE been so much indisposed with the fever that I told you had seized me, my nights during the whole week may be said to have been almost sleepless. The consequence has been, that, except the translation of about thirty lines at the conclusion of the thirteenth book, I have been forced to abandon Homer entirely. This was a sensible mortification to me, as you may suppose, and felt the more, because my spirits, of course, failing with my strength, I seemed to have peculiar need of my old amusement. It seemed hard, therefore, to be forced to resign it just when I wanted it most. But Homer's battles cannot be fought by a man who does not sleep well, and who has not some little degree of animation in the day time. Last night, however, quite contrary to my expectations, the fever left me entirely, and I slept quietly, soundly, and long. If it please God that it return not, I shall soon find myself in a condition to proceed. I walk constantly, that is to say, Mrs Unwin and I together; for at these times I keep her continually employed, and never suffer her to be absent from me many minutes. She gives me all her time, and all her attention, and forgets that there is another object in the world.

Mrs Carter* thinks on the subject of dreams as every body

* Mrs Elizabeth Carter, translator of Epictetus, a poetess, and remarkable linguist, was the daughter of the Rev. Mr Carter of Deal, where she was born in 1717. She died in London, at the age of eighty-nine. In learning she has been seldom equalled, even by the other sex. Her poetry, as Cowper says of her dreams, "shews nothing extraordinary; but it never displeases, and is generally elegant."

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else does,—that is to say, according to her own experience. She has had no extraordinary ones, and therefore accounts them only the ordinary operations of the fancy. Mine are of a texture that will not suffer me to ascribe them to so inadequate a cause, or to any cause but the operation of an exterior agency. I have a mind, my dear, (and to you I will venture to boast of it,) as free from superstition as any man living, neither do I give heed to dreams in general as predictive, though particular dreams I believe to be so. Some very sensible persons, and I suppose Mrs Carter among them, will acknowledge, that in old times God spoke by dreams, but affirm, with much boldness, that he has since ceased to do so. If you ask them, Why? they answer, Because he has now revealed his will in the Scripture, and there is no longer any need that he should instruct or admonish us by dreams. I grant that with respect to doctrines and precepts he has left us in want of nothing; but has he thereby precluded himself in any of the operations of his Providence? Surely not. It is perfectly a different consideration; and the same need that there ever was of his interference in this way, there is still, and ever must be, while man continues blind and fallible, and a creature beset with dangers which he can neither foresee nor obviate. His operations, however, of this kind are, I allow, very rare; and as to the generality of dreams, they are made of such stuff, and are in themselves so insignificant, that though I believe them all to be the manufacture of others, not our own, I account it not a farthing matter who manufactures them. So much for dreams!

My fever is not yet gone, but sometimes seems to leave me. It is altogether of the nervous kind, and attended, now and then, with much dejection.

A young gentleman called here yesterday, who came six miles out of his way to see me. He was on a journey to London from Glasgow, having just left the university there. He came, I suppose, partly to satisfy his own curiosity, but chiefly, as it seemed, to bring me the thanks of some of the Scotch professors for my two volumes. His name is Rose, an Englishman. Your spirits being good, you will derive more pleasure from this incident than I can at present, therefore I send it. Adieu, very affectionately, W. C.*

* The illness mentioned in this letter interrupted the writer's translation of Homer during eight months.

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246.—TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

CHARACTER OF BURNS AS A POET.

WESTON, *July* 24, 1787.

DEAR SIR,—This is the first time I have written these six months, and nothing but the constraint of obligation could induce me to write now. I cannot be so wanting to myself as not to endeavour, at least, to thank you both for the visits with which you have favoured me, and the poems that you sent me. In my present state of mind I taste nothing; nevertheless I read, partly from habit, and partly because it is the only thing that I am capable of.

I have, therefore, read Burns's Poems, and have read them twice; and, though they be written in a language that is new to me, and many of them on subjects much inferior to the author's ability, I think them, on the whole, a very extraordinary production. He is, I believe, the only poet these kingdoms have produced in the lower rank of life, since Shakespeare, (I should rather say since Prior,) who need not be indebted for any part of his praise to a charitable consideration of his origin, and the disadvantages under which he has laboured. It will be a pity if he should not hereafter divest himself of barbarism, and content himself with writing pure English, in which he appears perfectly qualified to excel. He who can command admiration, dishonours himself if he aims no higher than to raise a laugh.*

* These remarks are ill founded, and shew that Cowper did not fully comprehend the poetical character of Burns. Between Burns and Prior there can be no comparison as to the disadvantages of birth, whatever there might be in this respect between Shakespeare and Burns. Prior, though an orphan, and brought up by his uncle, an innkeeper, never knew those primary difficulties which humble birth and scanty means throw in the way of talent, since, from the first, he received the best education at Westminster School, and afterwards at St John's College, Cambridge. The opportunity of acquirement alone makes the difference between the upper and the lower ranks of life; consequently, "no charitable consideration of his origin" is to be claimed in favour of Prior. The observation on the English verses of Burns is neither nationally nor poetically correct. His attempts at mere English versification in no case exceed mediocrity: as an English poet he never would have attained reputation. On the other hand, so far from seeking "to raise a laugh," he is not surpassed by any poet, in ancient or modern times, in the pathetic sim-

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I am, dear sir, with my best wishes for your prosperity, and with Mrs Unwin's respects, your obliged and affectionate humble servant, W. C.

247. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

INVITATION TO FARTHER INTIMACY — BARCLAY'S ARGENIS.

WESTON, *August* 27, 1787.

DEAR SIR,—I have not yet taken up the pen again, except to write to you. The little taste that I have had of your company, and your kindness in finding me out, make me wish that we were nearer neighbours, and that there were not so great a disparity in our years, — that is to say, not that you were older, but that I were younger. Could we have met in early life, I flatter myself that we might have been more intimate than now we are likely to be. But you shall not find me slow to cultivate such a measure of your regard, as your friends of your own age can spare me. When your route shall lie through this country, I shall hope that the same kindness which has prompted you twice to call on me, will prompt you again, and I shall be happy if, on a future occasion, I may be able to give you a more cheerful reception than can be expected from an invalid. My health and spirits are considerably improved, and I once more associate with my neighbours. My head, however, has been the worst part of me, and still continues so; is subject to giddiness and pain, maladies very unfavourable to poetical employment; but a preparation of the bark, which I take regularly, has so far been of service to me in those respects, as to encourage in me a hope, that, by perseverance in the use of it, I may possibly find myself qualified to resume the translation of Homer.

plicity of his principal pieces in the Scottish dialect. Rightly might Burns have exclaimed with Milton, —

> Hail, native language! that with sinews weak
> Didst move my first endeavouring tongue to speak—
> Thou shalt cull those richest robes and best attire
> Which deepest sp'rits and choicest wits desire!
> All for some wand'ring thoughts that rove about,
> And loudly knock to have their passage out!

Prior, born 1664, died 1721. Burns, born near Ayr, 1759, died 1796.

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When I cannot walk, I read, and read perhaps more than is good for me. But I cannot be idle. The only mercy that I shew myself in this respect is, that I read nothing that requires much closeness of application. I lately finished the perusal of a book, which, in former years, I have more than once attacked, but never till now conquered; some other book always interfered, before I could finish it. The work I mean is Barclay's Argenis;* and, if ever you allow yourself to read for mere amusement, I can recommend it to you (provided you have not already perused it) as the most amusing romance that ever was written. It is the only one, indeed, of an old date that I ever had the patience to go through with. It is interesting in a high degree; richer in incident than can be imagined, full of surprises, which the reader never forestalls, and yet free from all entanglement and confusion. The style, too, appears to me to be such as would not dishonour Tacitus himself.

Poor Burns loses much of his deserved praise in this country, through our ignorance of his language. I despair of meeting with any Englishman who will take the pains that I have taken to understand him. His candle is bright, but shut up in a dark lantern. I lent him to a very sensible neighbour of mine; but his uncouth dialect spoiled all; and before he had half read him through, he was quite *ram-feezled*.†

W. C.

* John Barclay, author of the Argenis, and several other works in Latin, was the son of William Barclay of Aberdeenshire, one of the most eminent civilians of the sixteenth century, counsellor of state to the Duke of Lorraine, and author of different works. His son was born at Pont à Mousson, and died at Rome, in 1621. The Argenis almost merits the praise, which Cowper elsewhere gives it, of being "the best romance that ever was written." Of this work there are no less than four different translations: our poet appears to have read the original.

† Thanks to Sir Walter Scott,—who, by his own glories, added to the national tongue, has done much towards rendering a knowledge of it universal and *necessary* over the British Empire,—the language of Burns now hardly presents a difficulty to any Englishman pretending to be an admirer of genius. Both English and Scotch, however, would be much more *ram-feezled* by the "uncouth dialects" of London or the English counties, mere vulgarities, as these are, of affectation or ignorance; while the "northern speech," such, at least, as the "Cottar's Saturday Night," and the higher passages of the "Waverley Novels," exhibit but an older shade of Anglicism, a landmark to shew the progress of refinement, or like the towers of a Gothic cathedral rising among the streets and squares of a modern city.

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248.—TO LADY HESKETH.

HIS REVIVING HEALTH AND SPIRITS—THE THROCKMORTONS.

THE LODGE, *August* 30, 1787.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Though it costs me something to write, it would cost me more to be silent. My intercourse with my neighbours being renewed, I can no longer seem to forget how many reasons there are, why you especially should not be neglected; no neighbour, indeed, but the kindest of my friends, and, ere long, I hope, an inmate.

My health and spirits seem to be mending daily. To what end I know not, neither will conjecture, but endeavour, as far as I can, to be content that they do so. I use exercise, and take the air in the Park and Wilderness. I read much, but as yet write not. Our friends at the Hall make themselves more and more amiable in our account, by treating us rather as old friends, than as friends newly acquired. There are few days in which we do not meet, and I am now almost as much at home in their house as in our own. Mr Throckmorton, having long since put me in possession of all his ground, has now given me possession of his library,—an acquisition of great value to me, who never have been able to live without books, since I first knew my letters, and who have no books of my own. By his means I have been so well supplied, that I have not yet even looked at the Lounger, for which, however, I do not forget that I am obliged to you. *His* turn comes next, and I shall probably begin him to-morrow.

Mr George Throckmorton is at the Hall. I thought I had known these brothers long enough to have found out all their talents and accomplishments. But I was mistaken. The day before yesterday, after having walked with us, they *carried* us up to the library (a more accurate writer would have said, *conducted* us) and then they shewed me the contents of an immense portfolio, the work of their own hands. It was furnished with drawings of the architectural kind, executed in a most masterly manner, and among others, contained outside and inside views of the Pantheon, I mean the Roman one. They were all, I believe, made at Rome. Some men may be estimated at a first interview, but the Throckmortons must be seen often, and known long, before one can understand all their value.

They often inquire after you, and ask me whether you visit

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Weston this autumn. I answer, yes, and I charge you, my dearest cousin, to authenticate my information. Write to me, and tell us when we may expect to see you. We were disappointed that we had no letter from you this morning. You will find me coated and buttoned according to your recommendation.

I write but little, because writing is become new to me; but I shall come on by degrees. Mrs Unwin begs to be affectionately remembered to you. She is in tolerable health, which is the chief comfort here that I have to boast of. Yours, my dearest cousin, as ever, W. C.

249. — TO LADY HESKETH.

INVITATION TO WESTON — HIS READING.

THE LODGE, *September* 4, 1787.

MY DEAREST COZ,—Come when thou canst come, secure of being always welcome! All that is here is thine, together with the hearts of those who dwell here. I am only sorry, that your journey hither is necessarily postponed beyond the time when I did hope to have seen you; sorry, too, that my Uncle's infirmities are the occasion of it. But years *will* have their course, and their effect; they are happiest, so far as this life is concerned, who, like him, escape those effects the longest, and who do not grow old before their time. Trouble and anguish do that for some, which only longevity does for others. A few months since I was older than your father is now, and though I have lately recovered, as Falstaff says, *some smatch of my youth*, I have but little confidence, in truth none, in so flattering a change, but expect, *when I least expect it*, to wither again. The past is a pledge for the future.

Mr G. is here, Mrs Throckmorton's uncle. He is lately arrived from Italy, where he has resided several years, and is so much the gentleman, that it is impossible to be more so. Sensible, polite, obliging; slender in his figure, and in manners most engaging — every way worthy to be related to the Throckmortons.

I have read Savary's travels into Egypt; Memoirs du Baron de Tott; Fenn's original letters; the letters of Frederick of Bohemia, and am now reading Memoirs d'Henri de Lorraine, Duc de Guise. I have also read Barclay's Argenis, a Latin romance, and the best romance that ever was written. All

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these, together with Madan's letters to Priestley, and several pamphlets, within these two months. So I am a great reader.* W. C.

250. — TO LADY HESKETH.

HIS RURAL AMUSEMENTS — A VISITER.

THE LODGE, *September* 15, 1787.

MY DEAREST COUSIN, — On Monday last I was invited to meet your friend Miss J—— at the Hall, and there we found her. Her good nature, her humorous manner, and her good sense, are charming; insomuch that even I, who was never much addicted to speech making, and who at present find myself particularly indisposed to it, could not help saying at parting, — "I am glad that I have seen you, and sorry that I have seen so little of you." We were sometimes many in company; on Thursday we were fifteen, but we had not altogether so much vivacity and cleverness as Miss J——, whose talent at mirth-making has this rare property to recommend it, that nobody suffers by it.

I am making a gravel walk for winter use, under a warm hedge in the orchard. It shall be furnished with a low seat for your accommodation, and if you do but like it, I shall be satisfied. In wet weather, or rather after wet weather, when the street is dirty, it will suit you well, for lying on an easy declivity through its whole length, it must of course be immediately dry.

You are very much wished for by our friends at the Hall — how much by me I will not tell you till the second week in October. Yours, W. C.

* Nicholas Savary, a learned traveller, and oriental scholar, was born in Brittany, 1750, and died a year after the date of this letter. Francis Baron de Tott, a Frenchman by birth, but Hungarian by descent, was born in 1733, and died 1793. Sir John Fenn was born at Norwich, 1739, and died in 1794. He was a celebrated antiquary, and edited four volumes of historical letters, written chiefly by the Paston family, with a few, by others, during the reigns of Henry IV, Edward IV, Richard III, and Henry VII. Dr Joseph Priestley, born 1733, in Yorkshire, died 1804, in Pennsylvania. His works, amounting to from seventy to eighty volumes, contain some good, and many indifferent treatises, but his fame chiefly rests upon his discoveries in pneumatic chemistry.

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251. — TO LADY HESKETH.

MEMOIRS OF THE TURKS, BY BARON DE TOTT.

THE LODGE, *September* 29, 1787.

MY DEAR COZ.— I thank you for your political intelligence; retired as we are, and seemingly excluded from the world, we are not indifferent to what passes in it; on the contrary, the arrival of a newspaper, at the present juncture, never fails to furnish us with a theme for discussion, short, indeed, but satisfactory, for we seldom differ in opinion.

I have received such an impression of the Turks from the memoirs of Baron de Tott, which I read lately, that I can hardly help presaging the conquest of that empire by the Russians. The disciples of Mahomet are such babies in modern tactics, and so enervated by the use of their favourite drug; so fatally secure in their predestinarian dream, and so prone to a spirit of mutiny against their leaders, that nothing less can be expected. In fact, they had not been their own masters at this day, had but the Russians known the weakness of their enemies half so well as they undoubtedly know it now. Add to this, that there is a popular prophecy current in both countries, that Turkey is one day to fall under the Russian sceptre, —a prophecy which, from whatever authority it be derived, as it will naturally encourage the Russians, and dispirit the Turks, in exact proportion to the degree of credit it has obtained on both sides, has a direct tendency to effect its own accomplishment. In the meantime, if I wish them conquered, it is only because I think it will be a blessing to them to be governed by any other hand than their own; for under Heaven has there never been a throne so execrably tyrannical as theirs. The heads of the innocent that have been cut off to gratify the humour or caprice of their tyrants, could they be all collected and discharged against the walls of their city, would not leave one stone on another.

O that you were here this beautiful day! It is too fine by half to be spent in London. I have a perpetual din in my head, and though I am not deaf, hear nothing aright, neither my own voice, nor that of others. I am under a tub, from which tub accept my best love. Yours, W. C.

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252. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

RESUMPTION OF HIS STUDIES — LEAVING THE COUNTRY AFTER HIS FATHER'S DEATH.

WESTON, *October* 19, 1787.

DEAR SIR, — A summons from Johnson, which I received yesterday, calls my attention once more to the business of translation. Before I begin I am willing to catch though but a short opportunity to acknowledge your last favour. The necessity of applying myself with all diligence to a long work, that has been but too long interrupted, will make my opportunities of writing rare in future.

Air and exercise are necessary to all men, but particularly so to the man whose mind labours; and to him who has been all his life accustomed to much of both, they are necessary in the extreme. My time, since we parted, has been devoted entirely to the recovery of health and strength for this service, and I am willing to hope with good effect. Ten months have passed since I discontinued my poetical efforts; I do not expect to find the same readiness as before till exercise of the neglected faculty, such as it is, shall have restored it to me.

You find yourself, I hope, by this time as comfortably situated in your new abode, as in a new abode one can be. I enter perfectly into all your feelings on occasion of the change. A sensible mind cannot do violence even to a local attachment without much pain. When my father died, I was young, too young to have reflected much. He was rector of Berkhampstead, and there I was born. It had never occurred to me, that a parson has no fee-simple in the house and glebe he occupies. There was neither tree, nor gate, nor stile, in all that country, to which I did not feel a relation, and the house itself I preferred to a palace. I was sent for from London to attend him in his last illness, and he died just before I arrived. Then, and not till then, I felt for the first time that I and my native place were disunited for ever. I sighed a long adieu to fields and woods, from which I once thought I should never be parted, and was at no time so sensible of their beauties, as just when I left them all behind me, to return no more.

W. C.

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253. — TO LADY HESKETH.

ANECDOTES OF A KITTEN AND A LEECH.

THE LODGE, *November* 10, 1787.

THE Parliament, my dearest Cousin, prorogued continually, is a meteor dancing before my eyes, promising me my wish only to disappoint me, and none but the king and his ministers can tell when you and I shall come together. I hope, however, that the period, though so often postponed, is not far distant, and that once more I shall behold you, and experience your power to make winter gay and sprightly.

I have a kitten, the drollest of all creatures that ever wore a cat's skin. Her gambols are not to be described, and would be incredible, if they could. In point of size she is likely to be a kitten always, being extremely small of her age, but time I suppose, that spoils every thing, will make her also a cat. You will see her I hope before that melancholy period shall arrive, for no wisdom that she may gain by experience and reflection hereafter, will compensate the loss of her present hilarity. She is dressed in a tortoise-shell suit, and I know that you will delight in her.

Mrs Throckmorton carries us to-morrow in her chaise to Chicheley. The event however must be supposed to depend on elements, at least on the state of the atmosphere, which is turbulent beyond measure. Yesterday it thundered, last night it lightened, and at three this morning I saw the sky as red as a city in flames could have made it. I have a leech in a bottle that foretells all these prodigies and convulsions of Nature. No, not, as you will naturally conjecture, by articulate utterance of oracular notices, but by a variety of gesticulations, which here I have not room to give an account of. Suffice it to say, that no change of weather surprises him, and that in point of the earliest and most accurate intelligence, he is worth all the barometers in the world. None of them all, indeed, can make the least pretence to foretell thunder, — a species of capacity of which he has given the most unequivocal evidence. I gave but sixpence for him, which is a groat more than the market price, though he is in fact, or rather would be, if leeches were not found in every ditch, an invaluable acquisition.

W. C.

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254. — TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

HIS PLEASURE IN TRANSLATING HOMER.

November 16, 1787.

I THANK you for the solicitude that you express on the subject of my present studies. The work is undoubtedly long and laborious, but it has an end, and proceeding leisurely, with a due attention to the use of air and exercise, it is possible that I may live to finish it. Assure yourself of one thing, that though to a by-stander it may seem an occupation surpassing the powers of a constitution never very athletic, and, at present, not a little the worse for wear, I can invent for myself no employment that does not exhaust my spirits more. I will not pretend to account for this, I will only say that it is not the language of predilection for a favourite amusement, but that the fact is really so. I have even found that those plaything avocations, which one may execute almost without any attention, fatigue me, and wear me away, while such as engage me much, and attach me closely, are rather serviceable to me than otherwise. W. C.

255. — TO LADY HESKETH.

DELAY OF HER VISIT — THE CLERK OF NORTHAMPTON — ANECDOTE.

THE LODGE, *November* 27, 1787.

IT is the part of wisdom, my dearest Cousin, to sit down contented under the demands of necessity, because they are such. I am sensible that you cannot, in my uncle's present infirm state, and of which it is not possible to expect any considerable amendment, indulge either us, or yourself, with a journey to Weston. Yourself I say, both because I know it will give you pleasure to see *Causidice mi* * once more, especially in the comfortable abode where you have placed him, and because, after so long an imprisonment in London, you, who love the country, and have a taste for it, would of course be glad to return to it. For my own part, to me it is ever new, and though I have now been an inhabitant of this village a twelvemonth, and have during the half of that time

* "My pleader," the appellation which Sir Thomas Hesketh used to give him in jest, when he was of the Temple.

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been at liberty to expatiate, and to make discoveries, I am daily finding out fresh scenes and walks, which you would never be satisfied with enjoying—some of them are unapproachable by you either on foot or in your carriage. Had you twenty toes—whereas I suppose you have but ten—you could not reach them; and coach wheels have never been seen there since the flood. Before it, indeed, (as Burnet says that the earth was then perfectly free from all inequalities in its surface,) they might have been seen there every day. We have other walks both upon hill tops, and in valleys beneath, some of which by the help of your carriage, and many of them without its help, would be always at your command.

On Monday morning last, Sam brought me word that there was a man in the kitchen who desired to speak with me. I ordered him in. A plain, decent, elderly figure made its appearance, and being desired to sit, spoke as follows; "Sir, I am clerk of the parish of All-saints in Northampton; brother of Mr C. the upholsterer. It is customary for the person in my office to annex to a bill of mortality, which he publishes at Christmas, a copy of verses. You will do me a great favour, sir, if you would furnish me with one." To this I replied, "Mr C. you have several men of genius in your town, why have you not applied to some of them? There is a namesake of yours in particular, C———, the statuary, who, every body knows, is a first-rate maker of verses. He surely is the man of all the world for your purpose."—"Alas! sir, I have heretofore borrowed help from him, but he is a gentleman of so much reading, that the people of our town cannot understand him." I confess to you, my dear, I felt all the force of the compliment implied in this speech, and was almost ready to answer, Perhaps, my good friend, they may find me unintelligible too for the same reason. But on asking him whether he had walked over to Weston on purpose to implore the assistance of my muse, and on his replying in the affirmative, I felt my mortified vanity a little consoled, and pitying the poor man's distress, which appeared to be considerable, promised to supply him. The wagon has accordingly gone this day to Northampton loaded in part with my effusions in the mortuary style. A fig for poets who write epitaphs upon individuals! I have written *one*, that serves *two hundred* persons.

A few days since I received a second very obliging letter from Mr M[aty.] He tells me that his own papers, which are by far, he is sorry to say it, the most numerous, are marked

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V. I. Z. Accordingly, my dear, I am happy to find that I am engaged in a correspondence with Mr Viz, a gentleman for whom I have always entertained the profoundest veneration. But the serious fact is, that the papers distinguished by those signatures have ever pleased me most, and struck me as the work of a sensible man, who knows the world well, and has more of Addison's delicate humour than any body.

A poor man begged food at the Hall lately. The cook gave him some vermicelli soup. He ladled it about some time with the spoon, and then returned it to her, saying, "I am a poor man, it is true, and I am very hungry; but yet I cannot eat broth with maggots in it." Once more, my dear, a thousand thanks for your box full of good things, useful things, and beautiful things.— Yours ever, W. C.

256.—TO LADY HESKETH.

FAMILY AT WESTON HALL — PROVIDENCE SHAPES ALL OUR PLANS.

THE LODGE, *December* 4, 1787.

I AM glad, my dearest Coz, that my last letter proved so diverting. You may assure yourself of the literal truth of the whole narration, and that however droll, it was not in the least indebted to any embellishments of mine.

You say well, my dear, that in Mr Throckmorton we have a peerless neighbour: we have so. In point of information upon all important subjects; in respect, too, of expression and address; and in short, every thing that enters into the idea of a gentleman, I have not found his equal (not often) any where. Were I asked who in my judgment approaches nearest to him, in all his amiable qualities and qualifications, I should certainly answer, his brother George, who if he be not his exact counterpart, endued with precisely the same measure of the same accomplishments, is nevertheless deficient in none of them, and is of a character singularly agreeable, in respect of a certain manly, I had almost said heroic frankness, with which his air strikes one almost immediately. So far as his opportunities have gone, he has ever been as friendly and obliging to us as we could wish him, and were he lord of the Hall to-morrow, would, I dare say, conduct himself toward us in such a manner, as to leave us as little sensible as possible of the removal of its present owners. But all this I say, my dear, merely for the sake of stating the matter as it is; not in order to obviate, or to prove the inexpedience of any future

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plans of yours, concerning the place of our residence. Providence and time shape every thing; I should rather say Providence alone, for time has often no hand in the wonderful changes that we experience — they take place in a moment. It is not therefore worth while perhaps to consider much what we will or will not do in years to come, concerning which all that I can say with certainty at present is, that those years will be to me the most welcome in which I can see the most of you. W. C.

257. — TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

VISIT TO THE CHESTERS—DIFFICULTY OF RENDERING THE OPENING LINES OF THE ILIAD.

WESTON, *December* 6, 1787.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — A short time since, by the help of Mrs Throckmorton's chaise, Mrs Unwin and I reached Chicheley. "Now," said I to Mrs Chester, "I shall write boldly to your brother Walter, and will do it immediately. I have passed the gulf that parted us, and he will be glad to hear it." But let not the man who translates Homer be so presumptuous as to have a will of his own, or to promise any thing. A fortnight has, I suppose, elapsed since I paid this visit, and I am only now beginning to fulfil what I then undertook to accomplish without delay. The old Grecian must answer for it.

I spent my morning there so agreeably, that I have ever since regretted more sensibly, that there are five miles of a dirty country interposed between us. For the increase of my pleasure, I had the good fortune to find your brother the Bishop there. We had much talk about many things, but most, I believe, about Homer; and great satisfaction it gave me to find, that on the most important points of that subject his Lordship and I were exactly of one mind. In the course of our conversation he produced from his pocket-book a translation of the first ten or twelve lines of the Iliad, and in order to leave my judgment free, informed me kindly at the same time that they were not his own. I read them, and, according to the best of my recollection of the original, found them well executed. The Bishop indeed acknowledged that they were not faultless, neither did I find them so. Had they been such, I should have felt their perfection as a discouragement hardly to be surmounted; for at that passage I have

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laboured more abundantly than at any other, and hitherto with the least success. I am convinced that Homer placed it at the threshold of his work as a scarecrow to all translators. Now, Walter, if thou knowest the author of this version, and it be not treason against thy brother's confidence in thy secrecy, declare him to me. Had I been so happy as to have seen the Bishop again before he left this country, I should certainly have asked him the question, having a curiosity upon the matter that is extremely troublesome.

The awkward situation in which you found yourself on receiving a visit from an authoress, whose works, though presented to you long before, you had never read, made me laugh, and it was no sin against my friendship for you to do so. It was a ridiculous distress, and I can laugh at it even now. I hope she catechised you well. How did you extricate yourself?—Now laugh at me. The clerk of the parish of All-saints, in the town of Northampton, having occasion for a poet, has appointed me to the office. I found myself obliged to comply. The belman comes next, and then, I think, though even borne upon your swan's quill, I can soar no higher!—I am, my dear friend, faithfully yours, W. C.

258.—TO LADY HESKETH.

PROGRESS OF HIS TRANSLATION — LIFE CHANGES LIKE A STREAM.

THE LODGE, *December* 10, 1787.

I THANK you for the snip of cloth, commonly called a pattern. At present I have two coats, and but one back. If at any time hereafter I should find myself possessed of fewer coats, or more backs, it will be of use to me.

Even as you suspect, my dear, so it proved. The ball was prepared for, the ball was held, and the ball passed, and we had nothing to do with it. Mrs Throckmorton, knowing our trim, did not give us the pain of an invitation, for a pain it would have been. And why? as Sternhold says—Because, as Hopkins answers, we must have refused it. But it fell out singularly enough, that this ball was held, of all days in the year, on my birth-day—and so I told them—but not till it was all over.

Though I have thought proper never to take any notice of the arrival of MSS. together with the *other good things* in the box, yet certain it is, that I received them. I have furbished up the tenth book till it is as bright as silver, and am now

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occupied in bestowing the same labour upon the eleventh. The twelfth and thirteenth are in the hands of ———, and the fourteenth and fifteenth are ready to succeed them. This notable job is the delight of my heart, and how sorry shall I be when it is ended.

The smith and the carpenter, my dear, are both in the room, hanging a bell; if I therefore make a thousand blunders, let the said intruders answer for them all.

I thank you, my dear, for your history of the G———s. What changes in that family! And how many thousand families have in the same time experienced changes as violent as theirs! The course of a rapid river is the justest of all emblems, to express the variableness of our scene below. Shakespeare says, none ever bathed himself twice in the same stream, and it is equally true that the world upon which we close our eyes at night is never the same with that on which we open them in the morning.

I do not always say, give my love to my uncle, because he knows that I always love him. I do not always present Mrs Unwin's love to you, partly for the same reason—Deuce take the smith and the carpenter!—and partly because I forget it. But to present my own I forget never, for I always have to finish my letter, which I know not how to do, my dearest Coz, without telling you that I am, ever yours, W. C.

259. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

NECESSITY OF PERSEVERANCE — HOPE INCREASES WITH OBSTACLES — TALENTS GIVEN BY NATURE.

WESTON, *December* 13, 1787.

DEAR SIR,— Unless my memory deceives me, I forewarned you that I should prove a very unpunctual correspondent. The work that lies before me engages unavoidably my whole attention. The length of it, the spirit of it, and the exactness that is requisite to its due performance, are so many most interesting subjects of consideration to me, who find that my best attempts are only introductory to others, and that what to-day I suppose finished, to morrow I must begin again. Thus it fares with a translator of Homer. To exhibit the majesty of such a poet in a modern language is a task that no man can estimate the difficulty of till he attempts it. To paraphrase him loosely — to hang him with trappings that do not belong to him,—all this is comparatively easy: but to represent him

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with only his own ornaments, and still to preserve his dignity, is a labour that, if I hope in any measure to achieve it, I am sensible can only be achieved by the most assiduous, and most unremitting attention. Our studies, however different in themselves, in respect of the means by which they are to be successfully carried on, bear some resemblance to each other. A perseverance that nothing can discourage, a minuteness of observation that suffers nothing to escape, and a determination not to be seduced from the straight line that lies before us by any images with which fancy may present us, are essentials that should be common to us both. There are perhaps few arduous undertakings, that are not in fact more arduous than we at first supposed them. As we proceed, difficulties increase upon us, but our hopes gather strength also, and we conquer difficulties which, could we have foreseen them, we should never have had the boldness to encounter. May this be your experience, as I doubt not that it will. You possess by nature all that is necessary to success in the profession that you have chosen. What remains is in your own power. They say of poets, that they must be born such: so must mathematicians, so must great generals, and so must lawyers, and so indeed must men of all denominations, or it is not possible that they should excel. But with whatever faculties we are born, and to whatever studies our genius may direct us, studies they must still be. I am persuaded, that Milton did not write his Paradise Lost, nor Homer his Iliad, nor Newton his Principia, without immense labour. Nature gave them a bias to their respective pursuits, and that strong propensity, I suppose, is what we mean by genius. The rest they gave themselves. "Macte esto," therefore have no fears for the issue!

I have had a second kind letter from your friend Mr ——, which I have just answered. I must not, I find, hope to see him here, at least I must not much expect it. He has a family that does not permit him to fly southward. I have also a notion, that we three could spend a few days comfortably together, especially in a country like this, abounding in scenes with which I am sure you would both be delighted. Having lived till lately at some distance from the spot that I now inhabit, and having never been master of any sort of vehicle whatever, it is but just now that I begin myself to be acquainted with the beauties of our situation. To you I may hope, one time or other, to shew them, and shall be happy to do it, when an opportunity offers.—Yours most affectionately,

W. C.

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260. — TO LADY HESKETH.

SINGULAR POETICAL COINCIDENCE — MR MERRY — INOCULATION.

THE LODGE, *January* 1, 1788.

Now for another story almost incredible! — a story that would be quite such, if it was not certain that you give me credit for any thing. I have read the poem for the sake of which you sent the paper, and was much entertained by it. You think it, perhaps, as very well you may, the only piece of that kind that was ever produced. It is, indeed, original, for I dare say, Mr Merry never saw mine; but certainly it is not unique. For most true it is, my dear, that ten years since, having a letter to write to a friend of mine, to whom I could write any thing, I filled a whole sheet with a composition, both in measure and in manner precisely similar. I have in vain searched for it. It is either burnt or lost. Could I have found it, you would have had double postage to pay.* For, that one man in Italy, and another in England, who never saw each other, should stumble on a species of verse, in which no other man ever wrote, (and I believe that to be the case,) and upon a style and manner too, of which, I suppose, that neither of them had ever seen an example, appears to me so extraordinary a fact, that I must have sent you mine, whatever it had cost you, and am really vexed that I cannot authenticate the story by producing a voucher. The measure I recollect to have been perfectly the same, and as to the manner I am equally sure of that, and from this circumstance, that Mrs Unwin and I never laughed more at any production of mine, perhaps not even at John Gilpin. But for all this, my dear, you must, as I said, give me credit; for the thing itself is gone to that limbo of vanity, where alone, says Milton, things lost on earth are to be met with. Said limbo is, as you know, in the moon, whither I could not at present convey myself without a good deal of difficulty and inconvenience.

This morning being the morning of New Year's Day, I sent to the Hall a copy of verses, addressed to Mrs Throckmorton, entitled, the Wish, or the Poet's New Year's Gift. We dine there to-morrow, when, I suppose, I shall hear news of them. Their kindness is so great, and they seize with such eagerness

* This piece will be found among the Poems in the present edition.

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every opportunity of doing all they think will please us, that I held myself almost in duty bound to treat them with this stroke of my profession.

The small pox has done, I believe, all that it has to do at Weston. Old folks, and even women with child, have been inoculated. We talk of our freedom, and some of us are free enough, but not the poor. Dependent as they are upon parish bounty, they are sometimes obliged to submit to impositions, which perhaps in France itself could hardly be paralleled. Can man or woman be said to be free, who is commanded to take a distemper, sometimes at least mortal, and in circumstances most likely to make it so? No circumstance whatever was permitted to exempt the inhabitants of Weston. The old as well as the young have been inoculated. Were I asked, Who is the most arbitrary sovereign on earth? I should answer, neither the king of France, nor the Grand Signior, but an overseer of the poor in England.

I am as heretofore occupied with Homer; my present occupation is the revisal of all I have done, namely of the first fifteen books. I stand amazed at my own increasing dexterity in the business, being verily persuaded that, as far as I have gone, I have improved the work to double its former value.

That you may begin the new year and end it in all health and happiness, and many more when the present shall have been long an old one, is the ardent wish of Mrs Unwin, and of yours, my dearest Coz, most cordially, W. C.

261. — TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

REVISAL OF HOMER — THE GREEK POET NOT KNOWN TO ENGLISH READERS.

WESTON, *January 5*, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — I thank you for your information concerning the author of the translation of those lines. Had a man of less note and ability than Lord Bagot produced it, I should have been discouraged. As it is, I comfort myself with the thought, that even he accounted it an achievement worthy of his powers, and that even he found it difficult. Though I never had the honour to be known to his Lordship, I remember him well at Westminster, and the reputation in which he stood there. Since that time I have never seen him, except once, many years ago, in the House of Commons, when I heard him speak on the subject of a drainage bill better than any member there.

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My first thirteen books have been criticised in London; have been by me accommodated to those criticisms, returned to London in their improved state, and sent back to Weston with an imprimantur. This would satisfy some poets less anxious than myself about what they expose in public; but it has not satisfied me. I am now revising them again by the light of my own critical taper, and make more alterations than at the first. But are they improvements? you will ask —is not the spirit of the work endangered by all this attention to correctness? I think and hope that it is not. Being well aware of the possibility of such a catastrophe, I guard particularly against it. Where I find that a servile adherence to the original would render the passage less animated than it should be, I still, as at the first, allow myself a liberty. On all other occasions I prune with an unsparing hand, determined that there shall not be found in the whole translation an idea that is not Homer's. My ambition is to produce the closest copy possible, and at the same time as harmonious as I know how to make it. This being my object, you will no longer think, if indeed you have thought it at all, that I am unnecessarily and over much industrious. The original surpasses every thing; it is of an immense length, is composed in the best language ever used upon earth, and deserves, indeed demands, all the labour that any translator, be he who he may, can possibly bestow on it. Of this I am sure, and your brother the good Bishop is of the same mind, that at present, mere English readers know no more of Homer in reality, than if he had never been translated. That consideration indeed it was, which mainly induced me to the undertaking; and if after all, either through idleness, or dotage upon what I have already done, I leave it chargeable with the same incorrectness as my predecessors, or indeed with any other that I may be able to amend, I had better have amused myself otherwise. And you I know are of my opinon.

I send you the clerk's verses, of which I told you. They are very clerklike, as you will perceive. But plain truth in plain words seemed to me to be the *ne plus ultra* of composition on such an occasion. I might have attempted something very fine, but then the persons principally concerned, namely my readers, would not have understood me. If it puts them in mind that they are mortal, its best end is answered.—My dear Walter, adieu! yours faithfully, W. C.

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262. — TO LADY HESKETH.

REASONS FOR NOT WRITING MORE OCCASIONAL POETRY—BUNBURY'S PRINTS.

THE LODGE, *January* 19, 1788.

WHEN I have prose enough to fill my paper, which is always the case when I write to you, I cannot find in my heart to give a third part of it to verse. Yet this I must do, or I must make my pacquets more costly than worshipful, by doubling the postage upon you, which I should hold to be unreasonable. See then the true reason why I did not send you that same scribblement till you desired it. The thought which naturally presents itself to me on all such occasions is this, — Is not your cousin coming? Why are you impatient? Will it not be time enough to shew her your fine things when she arrives?

Fine things indeed I have few. He who has Homer to transcribe may well be contented to do little else. As when an ass, being harnessed with ropes to a sand cart, drags with hanging ears his heavy burden, neither filling the long echoing streets with his harmonious bray, nor throwing up his heels behind, frolicksome and airy, as asses less engaged are wont to do; so I, satisfied to find myself indispensably obliged to render into the best possible English metre eight-and-forty Greek books, of which the two finest poems in the world consist, account it quite sufficient, if I may at last achieve that labour; and seldom allow myself those pretty little vagaries, in which I should otherwise delight, and of which, if I should live long enough, I intend hereafter to enjoy my fill.

This is the reason, my dear Cousin — if I may be permitted to call you so in the same breath with which I have uttered this truly heroic comparison — this is the reason why I produce at present but few occasional poems, and the preceding reason is that which may account satisfactorily enough for my withholding the very few that I do produce. A thought sometimes strikes me before I rise; if it runs readily into verse, and I can finish it before breakfast, it is well; otherwise it dies, and is forgotten; for all the subsequent hours are devoted to Homer.

The day before yesterday, I saw for the first time Bunbury's new print, the Propagation of a Lie. Mr Throckmorton sent it for the amusement of our party. Bunbury sells humour by the yard, and is, I suppose, the first vender of it who ever did so. He cannot therefore be said to have humour without

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measure, (pardon a pun, my dear, from a man who has not made one before these forty years,) though he may certainly be said to be immeasureably droll.*

The original thought is good, and the exemplification of it, in those very expressive figures, admirable. A poem on the same subject, displaying all that is displayed in those attitudes and in those features, (for faces they can hardly be called) would be most excellent. The affinity of the two arts, namely verse and painting, has been observed; possibly the happiest illustration of it would be found, if some poet would ally himself to some draftsman, as Bunbury, and undertake to write every thing he should draw. Then let a musician be admitted of the party; he should compose the said poem, adapting notes to it exactly accommodated to the theme. So should the sister arts be proved to be indeed sisters, and the world die of laughing. W. C.

263.— TO LADY HESKETH.

ANXIETY TO HEAR FROM HER—HIS TENDENCY TO VIEW EVERY THING ON THE DARKEST SIDE.

THE LODGE, *January* 30, 1788.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—It is a fortnight since I heard from you, that is to say, a week longer than you have accustomed me to wait for a letter. I do not forget that you have recommended it to me, on occasions somewhat similar, to banish all anxiety, and to ascribe your silence only to the interruptions of company: good advice, my dear, but not easily taken by a man circumstanced as I am. I have learned in the school of adversity—a school from which I have no expectation that I shall ever be dismissed—to apprehend the worst, and have ever found it the only course in which I can indulge myself without the least danger of incurring a disappointment. This kind of experience, continued through many years, has given me such an habitual bias to the gloomy side of every thing, that I never have a moment's ease on any subject to which I am not indifferent. How then can I be easy, when I am left afloat upon a sea of endless conjectures, of which you furnish

* Henry William Bunbury, son of Sir William Bunbury of Milden Hall, died in 1811, at the age of sixty-one. He was the most celebrated caricaturist of which English art can boast; but his performances embrace so great a portion of high feeling and genius, that Sir Joshua Reynolds used to say Bunbury's drawing expressed more thought with simpler means than any thing else he had ever seen.

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the occasion? Write, I beseech you, and do not forget that I am now a battered actor upon this turbulent stage; that what little vigour of mind I ever had, of the self-supporting kind I mean, has long since been broken; and that, though I can bear nothing well, yet any thing better than a state of ignorance concerning your welfare. I have spent hours in the night leaning upon my elbow, and wondering what your silence means. I entreat you, once more, to put an end to these speculations, which cost me more animal spirits than I can spare; if you cannot, without great trouble to yourself, which, in your situation, may very possibly be the case, contrive opportunities of writing so frequently as usual, only say it, and I am content. I will wait, if you desire it, as long for every letter, but then let them arrive at the period once fixed, exactly at the time, for my patience will not hold out an hour beyond it. W. C.

264. — TO LADY HESKETH.

APOLOGY FOR A MELANCHOLY EPISTLE — TROUBLE THE LOT OF MORTALITY — HOMER.

THE LODGE, *February* 1, 1788.

PARDON me, my dearest Cousin, the mournful ditty that I sent you last. There are times when I see every thing through a medium that distresses me to an insupportable degree, and that letter was written in one of them. A fog that had, for three days, obliterated all the beauties of Weston, and a north-east wind, might possibly contribute not a little to the melancholy that indited it. But my mind is now easy, your letter has made it so, and I feel myself as blithe as a bird in comparison. I love you, my Cousin, and cannot suspect, either with or without cause, the least evil in which you may be concerned, without being greatly troubled. Oh trouble! the portion of all mortals, but mine in particular. Would I had never known thee, or could bid thee farewell for ever; for I meet thee at every turn, my pillows are stuffed with thee, my very roses smell of thee, and even my Cousin, who would cure me of all trouble if she could, is sometimes innocently the cause of trouble to me.

I now see the unreasonableness of my late trouble, and would, if I could trust myself so far, promise never again to trouble either myself or you in the same manner, unless warranted by some more substantial ground of apprehension.

What I said concerning Homer, my dear, was spoken, or

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rather written, merely under the influence of a certain jocularity that I felt at that moment. I am, in reality, so far from thinking myself an ass, and my translation a sand cart, that I rather seem, in my own account of the matter, one of those flaming steeds harnessed to the chariot of Apollo, of which we read in the works of the ancients. I have lately, I know not how, acquired a certain superiority to myself in this business, and, in this last revisal, have elevated the expression to a degree far surpassing its former boast. A few evenings since, I had an opportunity to try how far I might venture to expect such success of my labours as can alone repay them, by reading the first book of my Iliad to a friend of ours. He dined with you once at Olney. His name is Greatheed, a man of letters and of taste. He dined with us, and the evening proving dark and dirty, we persuaded him to take a bed. I entertained him as I tell you. He heard me with great attention, and with evident symptoms of the highest satisfaction, which, when I had finished the exhibition, he put out of all doubt by expressions which I cannot repeat. Only this he said to Mrs Unwin, while I was in another room, that he had never entered into the spirit of Homer before, nor had any thing like a due conception of his manner. This I have said, knowing that it will please you and will now say no more.

Adieu! my dear. Will you never speak of coming to Weston more? W. C.

265. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

VALUE OF YOUTH — NECESSITY OF REGULAR EMPLOYMENT — SPEECH OF GLAUCUS IN THE SIXTH BOOK OF THE ILIAD.

THE LODGE, *February* 14, 1788.

DEAR SIR, — Though it be long since I received your last, I have not yet forgotten the impression it made upon me, nor how sensibly I felt myself obliged by your unreserved and friendly communications. I will not apologize for my silence in the interim, because, apprised as you are of my present occupation, the excuse that I might allege will present itself to you of course, and to dilate upon it would therefore be waste of paper.

You are in possession of the best security imaginable for the due improvement of your time, which is a just sense of its value. Had I been, when at your age, as much affected by that important consideration as I am at present, I should not

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have devoted, as I did, all the earliest parts of my life to amusement only. I am now in the predicament into which the thoughtlessness of youth betrays nine-tenths of mankind who never discover that the health and good spirits, which generally accompany it, are in reality blessings only according to the use we make of them, till advanced years begin to threaten them with the loss of both. How much wiser would thousands have been, than now they ever will be, had a puny constitution, or some occasional infirmity, constrained them to devote those hours to study and reflection, which, for want of some such check, they have given entirely to dissipation! I, therefore, account you happy, who, young as you are, need not be informed that you cannot always be so; and who already know that the materials, upon which age can alone build its comfort, should be brought together at an earlier period. You have, indeed, in losing a father, lost a friend, but you have not lost his instructions. His example was not buried with him, but, happily for you, (happily because you are desirous to avail yourself of it,) still lives in your remembrance, and is cherished in your best affections.

Your last letter was dated from the house of a gentleman, who was, I believe, my schoolfellow; for the Mr C———, who lived at Watford, while I had any connection with Hertfordshire, must have been the father of the present, and, according to his age, and the state of his health, when I saw him last, must have been long dead. I never was acquainted with the family farther than by report, which always spoke honourably of them, though, in all my journeys to and from my father's, I must have passed the door. The circumstance, however, reminds me of the beautiful reflection of Glaucus in the sixth Iliad; beautiful, as well for the affecting nature of the observation, as for the justness of the comparison, and the incomparable simplicity of the expression. I feel that I shall not be satisfied without transcribing it, and yet, perhaps, *my* Greek may be difficult to decipher.

Οἵη περ φύλλων γενεὴ, τοιήδε καὶ ἀνδρῶν.
Φύλλα τὰ μὲν τ' ἄνεμος χαμάδις χέει, ἄλλα δέ θ' ὕλη
Τηλιθόωσα φύει, ἔαρος δ' ἐπιγίγνεται ὥρη
Ὡς ἀνδρῶν γενεὴ, ἡ μὲν φύει, ἡ δ' ἀπολήγει.*

* Like leaves on trees the race of man is found,
Now green in youth, now withering on the ground:
Another race the following spring supplies,
They fall successive, and successive rise:
So generations in their course decay,
So flourish these, when those have pass'd away. POPE.

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Excuse this piece of pedantry in a man whose Homer is always before him! What would I give that he were living now, and within my reach! I, of all men living, have the best excuse for indulging such a wish, unreasonable as it may seem, for I have no doubt that the fire of his eye, and the smile of his lips, would put me, now and then, in possession of his full meaning more effectually than any commentator. I return you many thanks for the elegies which you sent me, both which I think deserving of much commendation. I should requite you but ill by sending you my mortuary verses; neither, at present, can I prevail on myself to do it, having no frank, and being conscious that they are not worth carriage without one. I have one copy left, and that copy I will keep for you.

W. C.

266. — TO LADY HESKETH.

COWPER ONE OF THE FIRST TO DENOUNCE SLAVERY — HANNAH MORE — TRIAL OF WARREN HASTINGS.

THE LODGE, *February* 16, 1788.

I HAVE now three letters of yours, my dearest Cousin, before me, all written in the space of a week, and must be indeed insensible of kindness, did I not feel yours on this occasion. I cannot describe to you, neither could you comprehend it if I should, the manner in which my mind is sometimes impressed with melancholy on particular subjects. Your late silence was such a subject. I heard, saw, and felt a thousand terrible things, which had no real existence, and was haunted by them night and day, till they at last extorted from me the doleful epistle, which I have since wished had been burned before I sent it. But the cloud has passed, and as far as you are concerned, my heart is once more at rest.

Before you gave me the hint, I had once or twice, as I lay on my bed, watching the break of day, ruminated on the subject which, in your last but one, you recommended to me.

Slavery, or a release from slavery, such as the poor negroes have endured, or perhaps both these topics together, appeared to me a theme so important at the present juncture, and at the same time so susceptible of poetical management, that I more than once perceived myself ready to start in that career, could I have allowed myself to desert Homer for so long a time as it would have cost me to do them justice.

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While I was pondering these things, the public prints informed me that Miss More was on the point of publication, having actually finished what I had not yet begun.

The sight of her advertisement convinced me that my best course would be that to which I felt myself most inclined, to persevere, without turning aside to attend to any other call, however alluring, in the business I have in hand.

It occurred to me likewise, that I have already borne my testimony in favour of my black brethren; and that I was one of the earliest, if not the first, of those who have in the present day expressed their detestation of the diabolical traffic in question.

On all these accounts I judged it best to be silent, and especially because I cannot doubt that some effectual measures will now be taken to alleviate the miseries of their condition, the whole nation being in possession of the case, and it being impossible also to allege an argument in behalf of man-merchandise that can deserve a hearing. I shall be glad to see Hannah More's poem; she is a favourite writer with me, and has more nerve and energy both in her thoughts and language than half the he rhymers in the kingdom. The Thoughts on the Manners of the Great will likewise be most acceptable. I want to learn as much of the world as I can, but to acquire that learning at a distance; and a book with such a title promises fair to serve the purpose effectually.

I recommend it to you, my dear, by all means to embrace the fair occasion, and to put yourself in the way of being squeezed and incommoded a few hours, for the sake of hearing and seeing, what you will never have an opportunity to see and hear hereafter, the trial of a man who has been greater and more feared than the Great Mogul himself. Whatever we are at home, we have certainly been tyrants in the East; and if these men have, as they are charged, rioted in the miseries of the innocent, and dealt death to the guiltless, with an unsparing hand, may they receive a retribution that shall in future make all governors and judges of ours, in those distant regions, tremble. While I speak thus, I equally wish them acquitted. They were both my schoolfellows, and for Hastings I had a particular value. Farewell. W. C.

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267. — LADY HESKETH.

IMPEACHMENT OF HASTINGS — INUTILITY OF INVECTIVE FOR THE PURPOSES OF JUSTICE.

THE LODGE, *February* 22, 1788.

I DO not wonder that your ears and feelings were hurt by Mr Burke's severe invective. But you are to know, my dear, or probably you know it already, that the prosecution of public delinquents has always, and in all countries, been thus conducted. The style of a criminal charge of this kind has been an affair settled among orators from the days of Tully to the present, and like all other practices that have obtained for ages, this, in particular, seems to have been founded originally in reason, and in the necessity of the case.

He who accuses another to the state, must not appear himself unmoved by the view of crimes with which he charges him, lest he should be suspected of fiction, or of precipitancy, or of a consciousness that after all he shall not be able to prove his allegations. On the contrary, in order to impress the minds of his hearers with the persuasion that he himself at least is convinced of the criminality of the prisoner, he must be vehement, energetic, rapid; must call him tyrant, and traitor, and every thing else that is odious, and all this to his face, because all this, bad as it is, is no more than he undertakes to prove in the sequel; and if he cannot prove it, he must himself appear in a light very little more desirable, and, at the best, to have trifled with the tribunal to which he has summoned him.

Thus, Tully, in the very first sentence of his oration against Catiline, calls him a monster, — a manner of address in which he persisted till said monster, unable to support the fury of his accuser's eloquence any longer, rose from his seat, elbowed for himself a passage through the crowd, and at last burst from the senate-house in an agony, as if the Furies themselves had followed him.

And now, my dear, though I have thus spoken, and have seemed to plead the cause of that species of eloquence which you, and every creature who has your sentiments, must necessarily dislike, perhaps I am not altogether convinced of its propriety. Perhaps, at the bottom, I am much more of opinion, that if the charge, unaccompanied by any inflammatory matter, and simply detailed, being once delivered in to

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the court, and read aloud, the witnesses were immediately examined, and sentence pronounced according to the evidence; not only the process would be shortened, much time and much expense saved, but justice would have at least as fair play as now she has. Prejudice is of no use in weighing the question, Guilty or not guilty; and the principal aim, end, and effect of such introductory harangues is to create as much prejudice as possible. When you and I therefore shall have the sole management of such a business intrusted to us, we will order it otherwise.

I was glad to learn from the papers that our cousin Henry shone as he did in reading the charge. This must have given much pleasure to the General. Thy ever affectionate

W. C.

268. — TO LADY HESKETH.

TERMINATION OF A FOX CHASE — "IN AT THE DEATH."

THE LODGE, *March* 3, 1788.

ONE day last week, Mrs Unwin and I, having taken our morning walk, and returning homeward through the Wilderness, met the Throckmortons. A minute after we had met them, we heard the cry of hounds at no great distance, and mounting the broad stump of an elm, which had been felled, and by the aid of which we were enabled to look over the wall, we saw them. They were all that time in our orchard; presently we heard a terrier, belonging to Mrs Throckmorton, which you may remember by the name of Fury, yelping with much vehemence, and saw her running through the thickets, within a few yards of us, at her utmost speed, as if in pursuit of something which we doubted not was the fox. Before we could reach the other end of the Wilderness, the hounds entered also; and when we arrived at the gate which opens into the grove, there we found the whole weary cavalcade assembled. The huntsman dismounting begged leave to follow his hounds on foot, for he was sure, he said, that they killed him, — a conclusion which, I suppose, he drew from their profound silence. He was accordingly admitted, and with a sagacity that would not have dishonoured the best hound in the world, pursuing precisely the same track which the fox and the dogs had taken, though he had never had a glimpse of either after their first entrance through the rails, arrived where he found the slaughtered prey. He soon produced dead

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reynard, and rejoined us in the grove with all his dogs about him. Having an opportunity to see a ceremony, which I was pretty sure would never fall in my way again, I determined to stay, and to notice all that passed with the most minute attention. The huntsman having by the aid of a pitchfork lodged reynard on the arm of an elm, at the height of about nine feet from the ground, there left him for a considerable time. The gentlemen sat on their horses contemplating the fox, for which they had toiled so hard; and the hounds assembled at the foot of the tree, with faces not less expressive of the most rational delight, contemplated the same object. The huntsman remounted, cut off a foot, and threw it to the hounds—one of them swallowed it whole like a bolus. He then once more alighted, and drawing down the fox by the hinder legs, desired the people, who were by this time rather numerous, to open a lane for him to the right and left. He was instantly obeyed, when throwing the fox to the distance of some yards, and screaming like a fiend, "tear him to pieces"—at least six times repeatedly, he consigned him over absolutely to the pack, who in a few minutes devoured him completely. Thus, my dear, as Virgil says, what none of the gods could have ventured to promise me, time itself, pursuing its accustomed course, has of its own accord presented me with. I have been in at the death of a fox, and you now know as much of the matter as I, who am as well informed as any sportsman in England.— Yours, W. C.

269. — TO LADY HESKETH.

HANNAH MORE — MR WILBERFORCE — BLANK VERSE SUPERIOR TO RHYME.

THE LODGE, *March* 12, 1788.

SLAVERY, and the Manners of the Great, I have read. The former I admired, as I do all that Miss More writes, as well for energy of expression, as for the tendency of the design. I have never yet seen any production of her pen that has not recommended itself by both these qualifications. There is likewise much good sense in her manner of treating every subject, and no mere poetic cant (which is the thing that I abhor) in her manner of treating any. And this I say, not because you now know and visit her, but it has long been my avowed opinion of her works, which I have both spoken and written, as often as I have had occasion to mention them.

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Mr Wilberforce's little book (if he was the author of it) has also charmed me. It must, I should imagine, engage the notice of those to whom it is addressed. In that case one may say to them, either answer it, or be set down by it. They will do neither. They will approve, commend, and forget it. Such has been the fate of all exhortations to reform, whether in verse or prose, and however closely pressed upon the conscience, in all ages. Here and there a happy individual, to whom God gives grace and wisdom to profit by the admonition, is the better for it. But the aggregate body (as Gilbert Cooper used to call the multitude) remain, though with a very good understanding of the matter, like horse and mule that have none.

We shall now soon lose our neighbours at the Hall. We shall truly miss them, and long for their return. Mr Throckmorton said to me last night, with sparkling eyes, and a face expressive of the highest pleasure, — "We compared you this morning with Pope; we read your fourth Iliad, and his, and I verily think we shall beat him. He has many superfluous lines, and does not interest one. When I read your translation, I am deeply affected. I see plainly your advantage, and am convinced that Pope spoiled all by attempting the work in rhyme." His brother George, who is my most active amanuensis, and who indeed first introduced the subject, seconded all he said. More would have passed, but Mrs Throckmorton having seated herself at the harpsichord, and for my amusement merely, my attention was of course turned to her. The new vicar of Olney is arrived, and we have exchanged visits. He is a plain, sensible man, and pleases me much. A treasure for Olney, if Olney can understand his value.

W. C.

270. — TO GENERAL COWPER.

ENCLOSING POEMS ON THE SLAVE TRADE.

WESTON, 1788.

MY DEAR GENERAL, — A letter is not pleasant which excites curiosity, but does not gratify it. Such a letter was my last, the defects of which I therefore take the first opportunity to supply. When the condition of our negroes in the islands was first presented to me as a subject for songs, I felt myself not at all allured to the undertaking: it seemed to offer only images of horror, which could by no means be accommodated

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to the style of that sort of composition. But having a desire to comply, if possible, with the request made to me, after turning the matter in my mind as many ways as I could, I, at last, as I told you, produced three; and that which appears to myself the best of those three I have sent you. Of the other two, one is serious, in a strain of thought perhaps rather too serious, and I could not help it. The other, of which the slave-trader is himself the subject, is somewhat ludicrous. If I could think them worth your seeing, I would, as opportunity should occur, send them also. If this amuses you, I shall be glad. * W. C.

271.—TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

REVISAL OF THE FIRST FIFTEEN BOOKS OF THE ILIAD.

March 19, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The spring is come, but not I suppose that spring which our poets have celebrated. So I judge at least by the extreme severity of the season—sunless skies and freezing blasts, surpassing all that we experienced in the depth of winter. How do you dispose of yourself in this howling month of March? As for me, I walk daily, be the weather what it may, take bark, and write verses. By the aid of such means as these I combat the north-east wind with some measure of success, and look forward, with the hope of enjoying it, to the warmth of summer.

Have you seen a little volume lately published, entitled The Manners of the Great? It is said to have been writen by Mr Wilberforce; but whether actually written by him or not, is undoubtedly the work of some man intimately acquainted with the subject, a gentleman, and a man of letters. If it makes the impression on those to whom it is addressed, that may be in some degree expected from his arguments, and from his manner of pressing them, it will be well. But you and I have lived long enough in the world to know, that the hope of a general reformation in any class of men whatever—or of women either—may easily be too sanguine.

I have now given the last revisal to as much of my translation as was ready for it, and do not know that I shall bestow another single stroke of my pen on that part of it before I send it to the press. My business at present is with the sixteenth book, in which I have made some progress, but have not yet

* The *Morning Dream* accompanied this letter.—See *Poems*.

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actually sent forth Patroclus to the battle. My first translation lies always before me; line by line I examine it as I proceed, and line by line reject it. I do not, however, hold myself altogether indebted to my critics for the better judgment that I seem to exercise in this matter now than in the first instance. By long study of him, I am in fact become much more familiar with Homer than at any time heretofore, and have possessed myself of such a taste of his manner, as is not to be attained by mere cursory reading for amusement. But, alas! 'tis after all a mortifying consideration, that the majority of my judges hereafter will be no judges of this. *Græcum est, non potest legi*, is a motto that would suit nine in ten of those who will give themselves airs about it, and pretend to like or to dislike. No matter. I know I shall please *you*, because I know *what* pleases you, and am sure that I have done it.—Adieu! my good friend. Ever affectionately yours, W. C.

272.—TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

MRS UNWIN'S SINCERITY.—CLARKE'S HOMER—SLAVE TRADE.

WESTON, *March* 29, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I rejoice that you have so successfully performed so long a journey without the aid of hoofs or wheels. I do not know that a journey on foot exposes a man to more disasters than a carriage or a horse; perhaps it may be the safer way of travelling, but the novelty of it impressed me with some anxiety on your account.

It sems almost incredible to myself, that my company should be at all desirable to you, or to any man. I know so little of the world as it goes at present, and labour generally under such a depression of spirits, especially at those times when I could wish to be most cheerful, that my own share in every conversation appears to me to be the most insipid thing imaginable. But you say you found it otherwise, and I will not for my own sake doubt your sincerity. *De gustibus non est disputandum;* and since such is yours, I shall leave you in quiet possession of it, wishing indeed both its continuance and increase. I shall not find a properer place in which to say, accept of Mrs Unwin's acknowledgments, as well as mine, for the kindness of your expressions on this subject, and be assured of an undissembling welcome at all times, when it shall suit you to give us your company at Weston. As to her, she is one of the sincerest of the human race, and if she receives

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you with the appearance of pleasure, it is because she feels it. Her behaviour on such occasions is with her an affair of conscience, and she dares no more look a falsehood than utter one.

It is almost time to tell you that I have received the books safe, they have not suffered the least detriment by the way, and I am much obliged to you for them. If my translation should be a little delayed in consequence of this favour of yours, you must take the blame on yourself. It is impossible not to read the notes of a commentator so learned, so judicious, and of so fine a taste as Dr Clarke, * having him at one's elbow. Though he has been but a few hours under my roof, I have already peeped at him, and find that he will be *instar omnium* to me. They are such notes exactly as I wanted. A translator of Homer should ever have somebody at hand to say, "That's a beauty," lest he should slumber where his author does not; not only depreciating, by such inadvertency, the work of his original, but depriving perhaps his own of an embellishment which wanted only to be noticed.

If you hear ballads sung in the streets on the hardships of the negroes in the islands, they are probably mine. It must be an honour to any man to have given a stroke to that chain, however feeble. I fear, however, that the attempt will fail. The tidings which have lately reached me from London concerning it, are not the most encouraging. While the matter slept, or was but slightly adverted to, the English only had their share of shame in common with other nations on account of it. But since it has been canvassed and searched to the bottom — since the public attention has been rivetted to the horrible scheme — we can no longer plead either that we did not know it, or did not think of it. Wo be to us, if we refuse the poor captives the redress to which they have so clear a right, and prove ourselves in the sight of God and men indifferent to all considerations but those of gain! — Adieu,

W. C.

* Samuel Clarke, D.D. born at Norwich, 1675, died in 1724, eminent as a theologian, mathematician, and classic. As a commentator, Clarke is "learned and judicious," as Cowper says, but his version of Homer is more valuable as a faithful exposition of the text, than as a standard in matters of "taste."

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273. — TO LADY HESKETH.

NOTE REMINDING A LADY OF A PROMISE TO WRITE — SLAVE TRADE.

THE LODGE, *March* 31, 1788.

MY DEAREST COUSIN, — Mrs Throckmorton has promised to write to me. I beg that as often as you shall see her, you will give her a smart pinch and say, "Have you written to my Cousin?" I build all my hopes of her performance on this expedient, and for so doing, these my letters, not patent, shall be your sufficient warrant. You are thus to give her the question till she shall answer, "Yes." I have written one more song, and sent it. It is called the Morning Dream, and may be sung to the tune of Tweed Side, or any other tune that will suit it, for I am not nice on that subject. I would have copied it for you, had I not almost filled my sheet without it; but now, my dear, you must stay till the sweet sirens of London shall bring it to you, or if that happy day should never arrive, I hereby acknowledge myself your debtor to that amount. I shall now probably cease to sing of tortured negroes, a theme which never pleased me, but which, in the hope of doing them some little service, I was not unwilling to handle.

If any thing could have raised Miss More to a higher place in my opinion than she possessed before, it could only be your information that, after all, she, and not Mr Wilberforce, is author of that volume. How comes it to pass, that she, being a woman, writes with a force and energy, and a correctness hitherto arrogated by the men, and not very frequently displayed even by the men themselves! — Adieu, W. C.

275. — TO LADY HESKETH.

SMOLLETT'S DON QUIXOTE — COLLECTANEA CURIOSA — GENERAL COWPER.

THE LODGE, *May* 6, 1788.

MY DEAREST COUSIN, — You ask me how I like Smollett's Don Quixote?* I answer, well, perhaps better than any body's.

* Tobias Smollett, M.D. a native of Dunbartonshire, was born in 1721, died at Monte Nuovo, near Leghorn, aged fifty-one. The Briton who has stood beside the tomb in the beautiful cemetery where Smollett is laid in foreign dust, will never forget the scene or the moment, or the bitterness of his own feelings, as the thought arose, how much his country owes to the author's fame, and how little he owed to his country.

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But having no skill in the original, some diffidence becomes me. That is to say, I do not know whether I *ought* to prefer it or not. Yet there is so little deviation from other versions of it which I have seen, that I do not much hesitate. It has made me laugh I know immoderately, and in such a case *c'a suffit.*

A thousand thanks, my dear, for the new convenience in the way of stowage which you are so kind as to intend me. There is nothing in which I am so deficient as repositories for letters, papers, and litter of all sorts. Your last present has helped me somewhat; but not with respect to such things as require lock and key, which are numerous. A box, therefore, so secured, will be to me an invaluable acquisition. And since you leave me to my option what shall be the size thereof, I of course prefer a folio. On the back of the book-seeming box some artist, expert in those matters, may inscribe these words,—

COLLECTANEA CURIOSA,

the English of which is, a collection of curiosities,—a title which I prefer to all others, because if I live, I shall take care that the box shall merit it, and because it will operate as an incentive to open that which, being locked, cannot be opened. For in these cases the greater the balk, the more wit is discovered by the ingenious contriver of it,—namely, myself.

The General, I understand by his last letter, is in town. In my last to him, I told him news; possibly it will give you pleasure, and ought for that reason to be made known to you as soon as possible. My friend Rowley, who I told you has, after twenty-five years' silence, renewed his correspondence with me, and who now lives in Ireland, where he has many and considerable connections, has sent to me for thirty subscription papers. Rowley is one of the most benevolent and friendly creatures in the world, and will, I dare say, do all in his power to serve me.

I am just recovered from a violent cold, attended by a cough, which split my head while it lasted. I escaped these tortures all the winter; but whose constitution, or what skin, can possibly be proof against our vernal breezes in England? Mine never were, nor will be.

When people are intimate, we say they are as great as two inkle-weavers; on which expression I have to remark, in the first place, that the word *great* is here used in a sense which the corresponding term has not, so far as I know, in any other

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language;* and, secondly, that inkle-weavers contract intimacies with each other sooner than other people, on account of their juxtaposition in weaving of inkle. Hence it is that Mr Gregson † and I emulate those happy weavers in the closeness of our connection. We live near to each other, and while the Hall is empty, are each other's only extraforaneous comfort.—Most truly thine, W. C.

275.—TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

HOMER COMPLETED TO THE EIGHTEENTH BOOK.

WESTON, *May* 8, 1788.

ALAS! my library!—I must now give it up for a lost thing for ever. The only consolation belonging to the circumstance is, or seems to be, that no such loss did ever befall any other man, or can ever befall me again. As far as books are concerned, I am

Totus teres atque rotundus,

and may set fortune at defiance. The books which had been my father's had most of them his arms on the inside cover, but the rest no mark, neither his name nor mine. I could mourn for them like Sancho for his Dapple, but it would avail me nothing.

You will oblige me much by sending me Crazy Kate. A gentleman last winter promised me both her and the Lacemaker, but he went to London, that place in which, as in the grave, "all things are forgotten," and I have never seen either of them.

I begin to find some prospect of a conclusion, of the Iliad at least, now opening upon me, having reached the eighteenth book. Your letter found me yesterday in the very fact of dispersing the whole host of Troy by the voice only of Achilles. There is nothing extravagant in the idea, for you have witnessed a similar effect attending even such a voice as mine at midnight, from a garret window, on the dogs of a whole parish, whom I have put to flight in a moment.

W. C.

* The Scottish word *grit*, like the English *great*, signifies both *large* and *familiar*, but is now most frequently used in the latter sense. Dr Jamieson is inclined to think that the word in this peculiar signification has a distinct etymon. See his *Scottish Dictionary*, under the word *Grit*.

† Mr Gregson was a Roman Catholic clergyman, and private chaplain to the Throckmortons.

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276.—TO LADY HESKETH.

LADY MARY W. MONTAGU—HIS PEDESTRIAN EXCURSIONS.

THE LODGE, *May* 12, 1788.

IT is probable, my dearest Coz, that I shall not be able to write much, but as much as I can I will. The time between rising and breakfast is all that I can at present find, and this morning I lay longer than usual.

In the style of the lady's note to you I can easily perceive a smatch of her character. Neither men nor women write with such neatness of expression, who have not given a good deal of attention to language, and qualified themselves by study. At the same time it gave me much more pleasure to observe that my Coz, though not standing on the pinnacle of renown quite so elevated as that which lifts Mrs Montagu * to the clouds, falls in no degree short of her in this particular; so that should she make you a member of her academy, she will do it honour. Suspect me not of flattering you, for I abhor the thought; neither *will* you suspect it. Recollect that it is an invariable rule with me, never to pay compliments to those I love.

Two days, *en suite*, I have walked to Gayhurst; a longer journey than I have walked on foot these seventeen years. The first day I went alone, designing merely to make the experiment, and choosing to be at liberty to return at whatsoever point of my pilgrimage I should find myself fatigued. For I was not without suspicion that years, and some other things no less injurious than years, namely, melancholy and distress of mind, might by this time have unfitted me for such achievements. But I found it otherwise. I reached the church, which stands, as you know, in the garden, in fifty-five minutes, and returned in ditto time to Weston. The next day I took the same walk with Mr Powley, † having a desire to shew him the prettiest place in the country. I not only performed these two excursions without injury to my health,

* Lady Mary Pierrepont, eldest daughter of the Duke of Kingston, was born at Thoresby, Nottinghamshire, in 1690; married, in her twenty-second year, Mr Wortley Montagu; and died in 1762. She enjoyed in life the "three desirables" of rank, talent, and beauty; while she left behind her the two strongest claims to the admiration and gratitude of posterity,—the best literary production of its class—her Letters, and the most useful of discoveries—Inoculation.

† Mrs Unwin's son-in-law, a clergyman in Yorkshire.

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but have by means of them gained indisputable proof that my ambulatory faculty is not yet impaired; a discovery which, considering that to my feet alone I am likely, as I have ever been, to be indebted always for my transportation from place to place, I find very delectable.

You will find in the last Gentleman's Magazine a Sonnet, addressed to Henry Cowper, signed T. H. I am the writer of it. No creature knows this but yourself; you will make what use of the intelligence you shall see good.* W. C.

277. — TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

PRINTS FROM HIS POEMS—PROGRESS OF THE ILIAD TO THE NINETEENTH BOOK.

May 24, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — For two excellent prints I return you my sincere acknowledgments. I cannot say that poor Kate resembles much the original, who was neither so young nor so handsome as the pencil has represented her; but she was a figure well suited to the account given of her in the Task, and has a face exceedingly expressive of despairing melancholy. The lace-maker is accidentally a good likeness of a young woman, once our neighbour, who was hardly less handsome than the picture twenty years ago; but the loss of one husband, and the acquisition of another, have, since that time, impaired her much; yet she might still be supposed to have sat to the artist.

We dined yesterday with your friend and mine, the most companionable and domestic Mr C———.† The whole kingdom can hardly furnish a spectacle more pleasing to a man who has a taste for true happiness, than himself, Mrs C———, and their multitudinous family. Seven long miles are interposed between us, or perhaps I should oftener have an opportunity of declaiming on this subject.

I am now in the nineteenth book of the Iliad, and on the point of displaying such feats of heroism performed by Achilles, as make all other achievements trivial. I may well exclaim, Oh! for a muse of fire! especially having not only a great host to cope with, but a great river also. Much, however, may be done, when Homer leads the way. I should not have chosen to have been the original author of such a

* See Poems.

† Mr and Mrs Chester, the latter sister to the Rev. Mr Bagot, Cowper's correspondent.

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business, even though all the Nine had stood at my elbow. Time has wonderful effects. We admire that in an ancient, for which we should send a modern bard to Bedlam.

I saw at Mr [Chester's] a great curiosity,—an antique bust of Paris in Parian marble. You will conclude that it interested me exceedingly. I pleased myself with supposing that it once stood in Helen's chamber. It was in fact brought from the Levant, and though not well mended, (for it had suffered much by time,) is an admirable performance. W. C.

279. — TO LADY HESKETH.

LADY MONTAGU'S ESSAY ON SHAKESPEARE — ANTIQUE BUST OF PARIS.

THE LODGE, *May* 27, 1788.

MY DEAR COZ, — The General, in a letter which came yesterday, sent me enclosed a copy of my sonnet; thus introducing it:

"I send a copy of verses somebody has written in the Gentleman's Magazine for April last. Independent of my partiality towards the subject, I think the lines themselves are good." *

Thus it appears that my poetical adventure has succeeded to my wish, and I write to him by this post, on purpose to inform him that the somebody in question is myself.

I no longer wonder that Mrs Montagu stands at the head of all that is called learned, and that every critic veils his bonnet to her superior judgment. I am now reading, and have reached the middle of her Essay on the Genius of Shakespeare, a book of which, strange as it may seem, though I must have read it formerly, I had absolutely forgot the existence.

The learning, the good sense, the sound judgment, and the wit displayed in it, fully justify not only my compliment, but all compliments that either have been already paid to her talents, or shall be paid hereafter. Voltaire, I doubt not, rejoiced that his antagonist wrote in English, and that his countrymen could not possibly be judges of the dispute. Could they have known how much she was in the right, and by how many thousand miles the bard of Avon is superior to all their dramatists, the French critic would have lost half his fame among them.

* This refers to the "Sonnet on Henry Cowper." See Letter 276.

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I saw at Mr [Chester's] a head of Paris, an antique of Parian marble. His uncle, who left him the estate, brought it, as I understand, from the Levant: you may suppose I viewed it with all the enthusiasm that belongs to a translator of Homer. It is in reality a great curiosity, and highly valuable.

Our friend Sephus has sent me two prints, the Lace-maker and Crazy Kate. These also I have contemplated with pleasure, having, as you know, a particular interest in them. The former of them is not more beautiful than a lace-maker, once our neighbour at Olney; though the artist has assembled as many charms in her countenance, as I ever saw in any countenance, one excepted. Kate is both younger and handsomer than the original from which I drew, but she is in a good style, and as mad as need be.

How does this hot weather suit thee, my dear, in London? As for me, with all my colonnades and bowers, I am quite oppressed by it. W. C.

280. — TO LADY HESKETH.

INFLUENCE OF THE WEATHER ON HIS HEALTH — DANCING-MASTER'S ADVERTISEMENT.

THE LODGE, *June* 3, 1788.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,— The excessive heat of these last few days was indeed oppressive; but excepting the languor that it occasioned both in my mind and body, it was far from being prejudicial to me. It opened ten thousand pores, by which as many mischiefs, the effects of long obstruction, began to breathe themselves forth abundantly. Then came an east wind, baneful to me at all times, but following so closely such a sultry season, uncommonly noxious. To speak in the seaman's phrase, not entirely strange to you, *I was taken all aback;* and the humours which would have escaped, if old Eurus would have given them leave, finding every door shut, have fallen into my eyes. But in a country like this, poor miserable mortals must be content to suffer all that sudden and violent changes can inflict; and if they are quit for about half the plagues that Caliban calls down on Prospero, they may say, we are well off, and dance for joy, if the rheumatism or cramp will let them.

Did you ever see an advertisement by one Fowle, a dancing-master of Newport Pagnel? If not, I will contrive to send it to you for your amusement. It is the most extravagantly ludicrous affair of the kind I ever saw. The author of it had

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the good hap to be crazed, or he had never produced any thing half so clever; for you will ever observe, that they who are said to have lost their wits, have more than other people. It is therefore only a slander, with which envy prompts the malignity of persons in their senses to asperse wittier than themselves. But there are countries in the world, where the mad have justice done them, where they are revered as the subjects of inspiration, and consulted as oracles. Poor Fowle would have made a figure there. W. C.

281. — TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEATH OF LORD COWPER.

WESTON, *June* 8, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — Your letter brought me the very first intelligence of the event it mentions. My last letter from Lady Hesketh gave me reason enough to expect it, but the certainty of it was unknown to me till I learned it by your information. If gradual decline, the consequence of great age, be a sufficient preparation of the mind to encounter such a loss, our minds were certainly prepared to meet it: yet to you I need not say that no preparation can supersede the feelings of the heart on such occasions. While our friends yet live inhabitants of the same world with ourselves, they seem still to live to *us*; we are sure that they sometimes think of us; and however improbable it may seem, it is never impossible that we may see each other once again. But the grave, like a great gulf, swallows all such expectation, and in the moment when a beloved friend sinks into it, a thousand tender recollections awaken a regret, that will be felt in spite of all reasonings, and let our warnings have been what they may. Thus it is I take my last leave of poor Ashley, whose heart towards me was ever truly parental, and to whose memory I owe a tenderness and respect that will never leave me. W. C.

282. — TO LADY HESKETH.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT — HER CONSOLATION IN HAVING WATCHED OVER THE AGE OF HER PARENT.

THE LODGE, *June* 10, 1788.

MY DEAREST COUSIN, — Your kind letter of precaution to Mr Gregson sent him hither as soon as chapel-service was

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ended in the evening. But he found me already apprised of the event that occasioned it, by a line from Sephus, received a few hours before. My dear uncle's death awakened in me many reflections, which for a time sunk my spirits. A man like him would have been mourned, had he doubled the age he reached. At any age his death would have been felt as a loss, that no survivor could repair. And though it was not probable that for my own part I should ever see him more, yet the consciousness that he still lived was a comfort to me. Let it comfort us now, that we have lost him only at a time when nature could afford him to us no longer; that as his life was blameless, so was his death without anguish; and that he is gone to Heaven. I know not, that human life, in its most prosperous state, can present any thing to our wishes half so desirable as such a close of it.

Not to mingle this subject with others that would ill suit with it, I will add no more at present, than a warm hope, that you and your sister will be able effectually to avail yourselves of all the consolatory matter with which it abounds. You gave yourselves, while he lived, to a father, whose life was doubtless prolonged by your attentions, and whose tenderness of disposition made him always deeply sensible of your kindness in this respect, as well as in many others. His old age was the happiest that I have ever known, and I give you both joy of having had so fair an opportunity, and of having so well used it, to approve yourselves equal to the calls of such a duty in the sight of God and man. W. C.

288. — TO LADY HESKETH.

THE SAME SUBJECT — JOY OF MEETING OUR FRIENDS IN ANOTHER WORLD.

THE LODGE, *June* 15, 1788.

ALTHOUGH I know that you must be very much occupied on the present most affecting occasion, yet, not hearing from you, I began to be very uneasy on your account, and to fear that your health might have suffered by the fatigue, both of body and spirits, that you must have undergone, till a letter, that reached me yesterday from the General, set my heart at rest, so far as that cause of anxiety was in question. He speaks of my uncle in the tenderest terms, such as shew how truly sensible he was of the amiableness and excellence of his character, and how deeply he regrets his loss. We have indeed lost one who has not left his like in the present generation of our family, and whose equal, in all

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respects, no future of it will probably produce. My memory retains so perfect an impression of him, that, had I been painter instead of poet, I could from those faithful traces have perpetuated his face and form with the most minute exactness; and this I the rather wonder at, because some, with whom I was equally conversant five-and-twenty years ago, have almost faded out of all recollection with me. But he made an impression not soon to be effaced, and was in figure, in temper, and manner, and in numerous other respects, such as I shall never behold again. I often think what a joyful interview there has been between him and some of his contemporaries, who went before him. The truth of the matter is, my dear, that they are the happy ones, and that we shall never be such ourselves, till we have joined the party. Can there be any thing so worthy of our warmest wishes as to enter on an eternal, unchangeable state, in blessed fellowship and communion with those whose society we valued most, and for the best reasons, while they continued with us? A few steps more through a vain, foolish world, and this happiness will be yours. But be not hasty, my dear, to accomplish thy journey! For of all that live, thou art one whom I can least spare; for thou also art one who shalt not leave thy equal behind thee. W. C.

284.—TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

THE PETTINESS OF HUMAN MISCHIEF AN IMPROPER SUBJECT FOR POETRY.

WESTON, *June* 17, 1788.

MY DEAR WALTER,—You think me, no doubt, a tardy correspondent, and such I am, but not willingly. Many hinderances have intervened, and the most difficult to surmount have been those which the east and north-east winds have occasioned, breathing winter upon the roses of June, and inflaming my eyes, ten times more sensible of the inconvenience than they. The vegetables of England seem, like our animals, of a hardier and bolder nature than those of other countries. In France and Italy flowers blow, because it is warm, but here, in spite of the cold. The season, however, is somewhat mended at present, and my eyes with it. Finding myself this morning in perfect ease of body, I seize the welcome opportunity to do something at least towards the discharge of my arrears to you.

I am glad that you liked my song, and, if I liked the others myself so well as that I sent you, I would transcribe

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for you them also. But I sent *that*, because I accounted it the best. Slavery, and especially negro slavery, because the cruellest, is an odious and disgusting subject. Twice or thrice I have been assailed with entreaties to write a poem on that theme. But besides that it would be in some sort treason against Homer to abandon him for other matter, I felt myself so much hurt in my spirits the moment I entered on the contemplation of it, that I have at last determined absolutely to have nothing more to do with it. There are some scenes of horror on which my imagination can dwell, not without some complacence. But then they are such scenes as God, not man, produces. In earthquakes, high winds, tempestuous seas, there is the grand as well as the terrible. But when man is active to disturb, there is such meanness in the design, and such cruelty in the execution, that I both hate and despise the whole operation, and feel it a degradation of poetry to employ her in the description of it. I hope also that the generality of my countrymen have more generosity in their nature than to want the fiddle of verse to go before them in the performance of an act to which they are invited by the loudest calls of humanity.

Breakfast calls, and then Homer.—Ever yours, W. C.

Erratum.—Instead of Mr Wilberforce as author of Manners of the Great, read Hannah More.

My paper mourns, and my seal. It is for the death of a venerable uncle, Ashley Cowper, at the age of eighty-seven.

285.—TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

HIS AVOCATIONS — GOODNESS OF GOD, WHOSE INFLICTIONS ARE INTENDED TO CALL MEN TO REPENTANCE — SHORTNESS AND VANITY OF LIFE.

WESTON, *June* 23, 1788.

WHEN I tell you that an unanswered letter troubles my conscience in some degree like a crime, you will think me endued with a most heroic patience, who have so long submitted to that trouble on account of yours not answered yet. But the truth is, that I have been much engaged. Homer, you know, affords me constant employment; besides which, I have rather what may be called, considering the privacy in which I have long lived, a numerous correspondence: to one of my friends in particular, a near and much-loved relation, I write weekly, and sometimes twice in the week; nor are

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these my only excuses; the sudden changes of the weather have much affected me, and especially with a disorder most unfavourable to letter writing,—an inflammation in my eyes. With all these apologies I approach you once more, not altogether despairing of forgiveness.

It has pleased God to give us rain, without which this part of our country at least must soon have become a desert. The meadows have been parched to a January brown, and we have foddered our cattle for some time, as in the winter. The goodness and power of God are never, I believe, so universally acknowledged as at the end of a long drought. Man is naturally a self-sufficient animal, and in all concerns that seem to lie within the sphere of his own ability, thinks little, or not at all, of the need he always has of protection and furtherance from above. But he is sensible that the clouds will not assemble at his bidding, and that, though the clouds assemble, they will not fall in showers because he commands them. When therefore at last the blessing descends, you shall hear even in the streets the most irreligious and thoughtless with one voice exclaim,—"Thank God!" confessing themselves indebted to His favour, and willing, at least so far as words go, to give Him the glory. I can hardly doubt, therefore, that the earth is sometimes parched, and the crops endangered, in order that the multitude may not want a memento to whom they owe them, nor absolutely forget the power on which all depend for all things.

Our solitary part of the year is over. Mrs Unwin's daughter and son-in-law have lately spent some time with us. We shall shortly receive from London our old friends the Newtons—he was once minister of Olney;—and, when they leave us, we expect that Lady Hesketh will succeed them, perhaps to spend the summer here, and possibly the winter also. The summer indeed is leaving us at a rapid rate, as do all the seasons, and though I have marked their flight so often, I know not which is the swiftest. Man is never so deluded as when he dreams of his own duration. The answer of the old patriarch to Pharaoh may be adopted by every man at the close of the longest life,—"Few and evil have been the days of the years of my pilgrimage." Whether we look back from fifty, or from twice fifty, the past appears equally a dream; and we can only be said truly to have lived, while we have been profitably employed. Alas, then! making the necessary deductions, how short is life! Were men in

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general to save themselves all the steps they take to no purpose, or to a bad one, what numbers, who are now active, would become sedentary!

Thus I have sermonized through my paper. Living where you live, you can bear with me the better. I always follow the leading of my unconstrained thoughts when I write to a friend, be they grave or otherwise. Homer reminds me of you every day. I am now in the twenty-first Iliad.—Adieu,

W. C.

286.—TO LADY HESKETH.

PREPARATIONS FOR HER RECEPTION AT WESTON—HIS DOG BEAU AND THE WATER LILY.

THE LODGE, *June* 27, 1788.

For the sake of a longer visit, my dearest Coz, I can be well content to wait. The country—this country at least—is pleasant at all times, and when winter is come, or near at hand, we shall have the better chance for being snug. I know your passion for retirement indeed, or for what we call *dessy* retirement, and the F——s intending to return to Bath with their mother, when her visit at the Hall is over, you will then find here exactly the retirement in question. I have made in the orchard the best winter walk in all the parish, sheltered from the east, and from the north-east, and open to the sun, except at his rising, all the day. Then we will have Homer and Don Quixote: and then we will have saunter and chat, and one laugh more before we die. Our orchard is alive with creatures of all kinds; poultry of every denomination swarms in it, and pigs, the drollest in the world!

I rejoice that we have a cousin Charles also, as well as a cousin Henry, who has had the address to win the good-likings of the Chancellor. May he fare the better for it! As to myself, I have long since ceased to have any expectations from that quarter. Yet, if he were indeed mortified as you say, (and no doubt you have particular reasons for thinking so,) and repented to that degree of his hasty exertions in favour of the present occupant, who can tell? he wants neither means nor management, but can easily at some future period redress the evil, if he chooses to do it. But in the meantime life steals away, and shortly neither he will be in circumstances to do me a kindness, nor I to receive one at his hands. Let

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him make haste, therefore, or he will die a promise in my debt, which he will never be able to perform. Your communications on this subject are as safe as you can wish them. We divulge nothing but what might appear in the Magazine, nor that without great consideration.

I must tell you a feat of my dog Beau. Walking by the river side, I observed some water-lilies floating at a little distance from the bank. They are a large white flower, with an orange coloured eye, very beautiful.* I had a desire to gather one, and, having your long cane in my hand, by the help of it endeavoured to bring one of them within my reach. But the attempt proved vain, and I walked forward. Beau had all the while observed me very attentively. Returning soon after toward the same place, I observed him plunge into the river, while I was about forty yards distant from him; and, when I had nearly reached the spot, he swam to land with a lily in his mouth, which he came and laid at my foot.

Mr Rose, whom I have mentioned to you as a visiter of mine for the first time soon after you left us, writes me word that he has seen my ballads against the slave-mongers, but not in print. Where he met with them, I know not. Mr Bull begged hard for leave to print them at Newport-Pagnel, and I refused, thinking that it would be wrong to anticipate the nobility, gentry, and others, at whose pressing instance I composed them, in their design to print. But perhaps I need not have been so squeamish; for the opportunity to publish them in London seems now not only ripe, but rotten. I am well content. There is but one of them with which I am myself satisfied, though I have heard them all well spoken of. But there are very few things of my own composition, that I can endure to read, when they have been written a month, though at first they seem to me to be all perfection.

Mrs Unwin, who has been much the happier since the time of your return hither has been in some sort settled, begs me to make her kindest remembrance. Yours, my dear, most truly,

W. C.

* *Nymphæa Alba*, which Sir J. E. Smith terms, "the most magnificent of our native flowers."—*English Flora*.

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287. — TO LADY HESKETH.

SCENERY AT WESTON — ACCOUNT OF FIVE HUNDRED LIVING AUTHORS — HIS OWN MERITS AND DEFECTS.

THE LODGE, *July* 28, 1788.

IT is in vain that you tell me you have no talent at description, while in fact you describe better than any body. You have given me a most complete idea of your mansion and its situation; and I doubt not that with your letter in my hand by way of map, could I be set down on the spot in a moment, I should find myself qualified to take my walks and my pastime in whatever quarter of your paradise it should please me the most to visit. We also, as you know, have scenes at Weston worthy of description; but because you know them well, I will only say that one of them has, within these few days, been much improved, — I mean the Lime Walk. By the help of the axe and the woodbill, which have of late been constantly employed in cutting out all straggling branches that intercepted the arch, Mr Throckmorton has now defined it with such exactness, that no cathedral in the world can shew one of more magnificence or beauty. I bless myself that I live so near it; for were it distant several miles, it would be well worth while to visit it, merely as an object of taste; not to mention the refreshment of such a gloom both to the eyes and spirits. And these are the things which our modern improvers of parks and pleasure grounds have displaced without mercy; because, forsooth, they are rectilinear. It is a wonder they do not quarrel with the sunbeams for the same reason.

Have you seen the account of five hundred celebrated authors now living? I am one of them; but stand charged with the high crime and misdemeanour of totally neglecting method; an accusation which, if the gentleman would take the pains to read me, he would find sufficiently refuted. I am conscious at least myself of having laboured much in the arrangement of my matter, and of having given to the several parts of every book of the Task, as well as to each poem in the first volume, that sort of slight connection, which poetry demands; for in poetry (except professedly of the didactic kind) a logical precision would be stiff, pedantic, and ridiculous. But there is no pleasing some critics the comfort is, that I am contented, whether they be pleased or not. At the

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same time, to my honour be it spoken, the chronicler of us five hundred prodigies bestows on me, for aught I know, more commendations than on any other of my confraternity. May he live to write the histories of as many thousand poets, and find me the very best among them, Amen!

I join with you, my dearest Coz, in wishing that I owned the fee simple of all the beautiful scenes around you, but such emoluments were never designed for poets. Am I not happier than ever poet was, in having thee for my cousin, and in the expectation of thy arrival here whenever Strawberry Hill* shall lose thee?—Ever thine, W. C.

288. — TO LADY HESKETH.

HIS COMPANY — BACON THE SCULPTOR — HIS BROTHER'S POETICAL CORRESPONDENCE.

THE LODGE, *August* 9, 1788.

THE Newtons are still here, and continue with us, I believe, until the 15th of the month. Here is also my friend, Mr Rose, a valuable young man, who, attracted by the effluvia of my genius, found me out in my retirement last January twelvemonth. I have not permitted him to be idle, but have made him transcribe for me the twelfth book of the Iliad. He brings me the compliments of several of the literati, with whom he is acquainted in town, and tells me, that from Dr Maclain, whom he saw lately, he learns that my book is in the hands of sixty different persons at the Hague, who are all enchanted with it, not forgetting the said Dr Maclain himself, who tells him that he reads it every day, and is always the better for it. O rare we!

I have been employed this morning in composing a Latin motto for the king's clock; the embellishments of which are by Mr Bacon. That gentleman breakfasted with us on Wednesday, having come thirty-seven miles out of his way on purpose to see your cousin. At his request I have done it, and have made two: he will choose that which liketh him best. Mr Bacon is a most excellent man, and a most agreeable companion: I would that he lived not so remote, or that he had more opportunity of travelling.

* Strawberry Hill, on the bank of the Thames, about two miles above Richmond, the seat of Horace Walpole, placed amid some of the loveliest scenes in England. It contains also many interesting relics of literature and the arts.

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There is not, so far as I know, a syllable of the rhyming correspondence between me and my poor brother left, save and except the six lines of it quoted in yours. I *had* the whole of it, but it perished in the wreck of a thousand other things, when I left the Temple.*

Breakfast calls. Adieu! W. C.

289. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

REGRETS HIS DEPARTURE — PEDESTRIAN EXCURSION — DOG AND THE WATER LILY.

WESTON, *August* 18, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — I left you with a sensible regret, alleviated only by the consideration that I shall see you again in October. I was under some concern also, lest, not being able to give you any certain directions myself, nor knowing where you might find a guide, you should wander and fatigue yourself, good walker as you are, before you could reach Northampton. Perhaps you heard me whistle just after our separation; it was to call back Beau, who was running after you with all speed, to entreat you to return with me. For my part, I took my own time to return, and did not reach home till after one; and then so weary, that I was glad of my great chair, to the comforts of which I added a crust and a glass of rum and water, not without great occasion. Such a foot-traveller am I.

I am writing on Monday, but whether I shall finish my letter this morning depends on Mrs Unwin's coming sooner or later down to breakfast. Something tells me that you set off to-day for Birmingham; and though it be a sort of Iricism to say here, "I beseech you take care of yourself, for the day threatens great heat," I cannot help it. The weather may be cold enough at the time when that good advice shall reach you; but be it hot, or be it cold, to a man who travels as you travel, "Take care of yourself," can never be an unseasonable caution. I am sometimes distressed on this account; for though you are young, and well made for such exploits, those very circumstances are more likely than any thing to betray you into danger.

Consule quid valeant PLANTÆ, quid ferre recusent.

The Newtons left us on Friday. We frequently talked

* See Life. Among these "thousand other things," the reader will find that all the early productions of Cowper's genius perished also.

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about you after your departure, and every thing that was spoken was to your advantage. I know they will be glad to see you in London, and perhaps when your summer and autumn rambles are over, you will afford them that pleasure. The Throckmortons are equally well disposed to you, and them also I recommend to you as a valuable connection, the rather because you can only cultivate it at Weston.

I have not been idle since you went, having not only laboured as usual at the Iliad, but composed a *spick* and *span* new piece, called "The Dog and the Water Lily," which you shall see when we meet again. I believe I related to you the incident which is the subject of it. I have also read most of Lavater's Aphorisms; they appear to me some of them wise, many of them whimsical, a few of them false, and not a few of them extravagant. *Nil illi medium.* If he finds in a man the feature or quality that he approves, he deifies him; if the contrary, he is a devil. His verdict is in neither case, I suppose, a just one.* W. C.

290. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

YARDLEY OAK — EVILS OF DIFFIDENCE.

WESTON, *September* 11, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — Since your departure I have twice visited the oak, and with an intention to push my inquiries a mile beyond it, where it seems I should have found another oak, much larger, and much more respectable than the former; but once I was hindered by the rain, and once by the sultriness of the day. This latter oak has been known by the name of Judith many ages, and is said to have been an oak at the time of the Conquest. If I have not an opportunity to reach it before your arrival here, we will attempt that exploit together; and even if I should have been able to visit it ere you come, I shall be yet glad to do so; for the pleasure of extraordinary sights, like all other pleasures, is doubled by the participation of a friend.†

You wish for a copy of my little dog's eulogium, which I will therefore transcribe; but by so doing, I shall leave myself but scanty room for prose.

* John Gasper Lavater, a native of Zuric, friend and fellow student of Fuseli, born 1741, died 1801. Cowper gives a just character of his celebrated work.

† See the Poem Yardley Oak.

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I shall be sorry if our neighbours at the Hall should have left it, when we have the pleasure of seeing you. I want you to see them soon again, that a little *consuetudo* may wear off restraint; and you may be able to improve the advantage you have already gained in that quarter. I pitied you for the fears which deprived you of your uncle's company, and the more, having suffered so much by those fears myself. Fight against that vicious fear, for such it is, as strenuously as you can. It is the worst enemy that can attack a man destined to the forum—it ruined me. To associate as much as possible with the most respectable company for good sense and good breeding, is, I believe, the only, at least I am sure it is the best remedy. The society of men of pleasure will not cure it, but rather leaves us more exposed to its influence in company of better persons.—Now for the Dog and the Water Lily.* W. C.

291.—TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

RIDDLE—MISCONDUCT OF AN ACQUAINTANCE—ILIAD FINISHED—ODYSSEY COMMENCED.

WESTON, *September* 25, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

> Say, what is the thing, by my riddle design'd,
> Which you carried to London, and yet left behind?

I expect your answer, and without a fee. The half hour next before breakfast I devote to you. The moment Mrs Unwin arrives in the study, be what I have written much or little, I shall make my bow, and take leave. If you live to be a judge, as if I augur right you will, I shall expect to hear of a walking circuit.

I was shocked at what you tell me of ———. Superior talents, it seems, give no security for propriety of conduct; on the contrary, having a natural tendency to nourish pride, they often betray the possessor into such mistakes, as men more moderately gifted never commit. Ability, therefore, is not wisdom, and an ounce of grace is a better guard against gross absurdity than the brightest talents in the world.

I rejoice that you are prepared for transcript work: here will be plenty for you. The day on which you shall receive this, I beg you will remember to drink one glass, at least, to the success of the Iliad, which I finished the day before

* See Poems.

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yesterday, and yesterday began the Odyssey. It will be some time before I shall perceive myself travelling in another road; the objects around me are at present so much the same, Olympus and a council of gods meet me at my first entrance. To tell you the truth, I am weary of heroes and deities, and, with reverence be it spoken, shall be glad, for variety's sake, to exchange their company for that of a Cyclops.

Weston has not been without its tragedies since you left us: Mrs Throckmorton's piping bullfinch has been eaten by a rat, and the villain left nothing but poor Bully's beak behind him. It will be a wonder if this event does not at some convenient time employ my versifying passion. Did ever fair lady, from the Lesbia of Catullus to the present day, lose her bird, and find no poet to commemorate the loss?

W. C.

292. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

VINCENT BOURNE — INVITATION.

WESTON, *November* 30, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — Your letter, accompanying the books with which you have favoured me, and for which I return you a thousand thanks, did not arrive till yesterday. I shall have great pleasure in taking now and then a peep at my old friend Vincent Bourne; the neatest of all men in his versification, though when I was under his ushership, at Westminster, the most slovenly in his person. He was so inattentive to his boys, and so indifferent whether they brought him good or bad exercises, or none at all, that he seemed determined, as he was the best, so to be the last Latin poet of the Westminster line; a plot which, I believe, he executed very successfully; for I have not heard of any who has at all deserved to be compared with him.

We have had hardly any rain or snow since you left us; the roads are accordingly as dry as in the middle of summer, and the opportunity of walking much more favourable. We have no season in my mind so pleasant as such a winter: and I account it particularly fortunate that such it proves, my cousin being with us. She is in good health, and cheerful; so are we all; and this I say, knowing you will be glad to hear it, for you have seen the time when this could not be said of all your friends at Weston. We shall rejoice to see you here

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at Christmas; but I recollect, when I hinted such an excursion by word of mouth, you gave me no great encouragement to expect you. Minds alter, and yours may be of the number of those that do so; and if it should, you will be entirely welcome to us all. Were there no other reason for your coming than merely the pleasure it will afford to us, that reason alone would be sufficient; but after so many toils, and with so many more in prospect, it seems essential to your well-being that you should allow yourself a respite, which perhaps you can take as comfortably (I am sure as quietly) here as any where.

The ladies beg to be remembered to you with all possible esteem and regard; they are just come down to breakfast, and being at this moment extremely talkative, oblige me to put an end to my letter. Adieu. W. C.

293. — TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

NOTE INTRODUCING MR ROSE.

WESTON-UNDERWOOD, *December* 2, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — I told you lately that I had an ambition to introduce to your acquaintance my valuable friend, Mr Rose. He is now before you. You will find him a person of genteel manners and agreeable conversation. As to his other virtues and good qualities, which are many, and such as are not often found in men of his years, I consign them over to your own discernment, perfectly sure that none of them will escape you. I give you joy of each other, and remain, my dear old friend, most truly yours, W. C.

294. — TO ROBERT SMITH, ESQ.

MRS UNWIN'S HEALTH — PROGRESS OF HOMER.

WESTON-UNDERWOOD, *Dec.* 20, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR, — Mrs Unwin is in tolerable health, and adds her warmest thanks to mine for your favour, and for your obliging inquiries. My own health is better than it has been many years. Long time I had a stomach that would digest nothing, and now nothing disagrees with it, an amendment for which I am, under God, indebted to the daily use of soluble tartar, which I have never omitted these two years. I

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am still, as you may suppose, occupied in my long labour. The Iliad has nearly received its last polish; and I have advanced in a rough copy as far as to the ninth book of the Odyssey. My friends are some of them in haste to see the work printed, and my answer to them is—"I do nothing else, and this I do day and night—it must in time be finished."

My thoughts, however, are not engaged to Homer only. I cannot be so much a poet as not to feel greatly for the King, the Queen, and the country. My speculations on these subjects are indeed melancholy, for no such tragedy has befallen in my day. We are forbidden to trust in man; I will not therefore say, I trust in Mr Pitt; but, in his counsels, under the blessing of Providence, the remedy is, I believe, to be found, if a remedy there be. His integrity, firmness, and sagacity, are the only human means that seem adequate to the great emergence.*

You say nothing of your own health, of which I should have been happy to have heard favourably. May you long enjoy the best. Neither Mrs Unwin nor myself have a sincerer or a warmer wish than for your felicity.—I am, my dear sir, your most obliged and affectionate, W. C.

295.—TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

MEMORY — SIR JOHN HAWKINS'S MEMOIRS.

THE LODGE, *Jan.* 19, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,—I have taken, since you went away, many of the walks which we have taken together; and none of them, I believe, without thoughts of you. I have, though not a good memory in general, yet a good local memory, and can recollect, by the help of a tree or stile, what you said on that particular spot. For this reason I purpose, when the summer is come, to walk with a book in my pocket: what I read at my fireside I forget, but what I read under a hedge, or at the side of a pond, that pond and that hedge will always bring to my remembrance; and this is a sort of *memoria technica* which I would recommend to you, if I did not know that you have no occasion for it.

* This passage alludes to the celebrated Regency Bill on the mental affliction of George III,—a measure by which Mr Pitt unquestionably outraged the first principles of the constitution and of monarchy.

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I am reading Sir John Hawkins, and still hold the same opinion of his book as when you were here. There are in it, undoubtedly, some awkwardnesses of phrase, and, which is worse, here and there some unequivocal indications of a vanity not easily pardonable in a man of his years; but on the whole, I find it amusing; and to me at least, to whom every thing that has passed in the literary world within these five-and-twenty years is new, sufficiently replete with information. Mr Throckmorton told me about three days since, that it was lately recommended to him by a sensible man, as a book that would give him great insight into the history of modern literature, and modern men of letters—a commendation which I really think it merits. Fifty years hence, perhaps, the world will feel itself obliged to him. W. C.

296.—TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

ACCIDENTS OCCUR WHEN LEAST EXPECTED.

THE LODGE, *January* 24, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,—We have heard from my cousin in Norfolk Street; she reached home safely, and in good time. An observation suggests itself, which, though I have but little time for observation-making, I must allow myself time to mention. Accidents, as we call them, generally occur when there seems least reason to expect them; if a friend of ours travels far in different roads, and at an unfavourable season, we are reasonably alarmed for the safety of one in whom we take so much interest; yet how seldom do we hear a tragical account of such a journey! It is, on the contrary, at home, in our yard or garden, perhaps in our parlour, that disaster finds us; in any place, in short, where we seem perfectly out of the reach of danger. The lesson inculcated by such a procedure on the part of Providence towards us seems to be that of perpetual dependence.

Having preached this sermon, I must hasten to a close; you know that I am not idle, nor can I afford to be so; I would gladly spend more time with you, but by some means or other this day has hitherto proved a day of hinderance and confusion. W. C.

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297. — TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

TRANSLATION OF THE ELEVENTH BOOK OF THE ODYSSEY.

WESTON, *January* 29, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — I shall be a better, at least a more frequent correspondent, when I have done with Homer. I am not forgetful of any letters that I owe, and least of all forgetful of my debts in that way to you; on the contrary, I live in a continual state of self-reproach for not writing more punctually; but the old Grecian, whom I charge myself never to neglect, lest I should never finish him, has at present a voice that seems to drown all other demands, and many to which I could listen with more pleasure than even to his *Os rotundum*. I am now in the eleventh book of the Odyssey, conversing with the dead. Invoke the Muse in my behalf, that I may roll the stone of Sisyphus with some success. To do it as Homer has done it is, I suppose, in our verse and language, impossible; but I will hope not to labour altogether to as little purpose as Sisyphus himself did.

Though I meddle little with politics, and can find but little leisure to do so, the present state of things unavoidably engages a share of my attention. But as they say, Archimedes, when Syracuse was taken, was found busied in the solution of a problem, so, come what may, I shall be found translating Homer. — Sincerely yours, W. C.

298. — TO SAMUEL ROSE. ESQ.

PROGRESS OF THE ODYSSEY—LINES ON THE QUEEN'S VISIT—HAWKINS BROWN.

THE LODGE, *May* 20, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,—Finding myself, between twelve and one, at the end of the seventeenth book of the Odyssey, I give the interval between the present moment and the time of walking, to you. If I write letters before I sit down to Homer, I feel my spirits too flat for poetry; and too flat for letter-writing, if I address myself to Homer first; but the last I choose as the least evil, because my friends will pardon my dulness, but the public will not.

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I had been some days uneasy on your account, when yours arrived. We should have rejoiced to have seen you, would your engagements have permitted: but in the autumn I hope, if not before, we shall have the pleasure to receive you. At what time we may expect Lady Hesketh, at present I know not; but imagine that at any time after the month of June you will be sure to find her with us, which I mention, knowing that to meet you will add a relish to all the pleasures she can find at Weston.

When I wrote those lines on the Queen's visit, I thought I had performed well; but it belongs to me, as I have told you before, to dislike whatever I write when it has been written a month. The performance was therefore sinking in my esteem, when your approbation of it, arriving in good time, buoyed it up again. It will now keep possession of the place it holds in my good opinion, because it has been favoured with yours; and a copy will certainly be at your service, whenever you choose to have one.

Nothing is more certain than that when I wrote the line,

God made the country, and man made the town,

I had not the least recollection of that very similar one which you quote from Hawkins Brown.* It convinces me that critics (and none more than Warton, in his notes on Milton's minor poems) have often charged authors with borrowing what they drew from their own fund.† Brown was an entertaining companion when he had drunk his bottle, but not before: this proved a snare to him, and he would sometimes drink too much; but I know not that he was chargeable with any other irregularities. He had those among his intimates who would not have been such, had he been otherwise

* Isaac Hawkins Browne, as the name appears in his title pages, was born at Baden, in 1706; author of the exquisite Latin poem, *De Animi Immortalitate*, and other works, the most popular of which is the Pipe of Tobacco. He was called to the English bar, served in Parliament for the borough of Wenlock, and died in 1766. He appears to have been one of Cowper's early acquaintances; and though extremely witty and eloquent in conversation, he never spoke in Parliament.

† The parenthesis applies to Warton's frequent quotations, in his notes, from the Latin poets, especially Ovid, with the intention of shewing that Milton borrowed some of his happiest allusions. We agree with Cowper in thinking that these supposed plagiarisms are chiefly accidental coincidences of thought.

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viciously inclined; the Duncombes,* in particular, father and son, who were of unblemished morals. W. C.

299. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

BOSWELL'S TOUR.

THE LODGE, *June* 5, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am going to give you a deal of trouble; but London folks must be content to be troubled by country folks; for in London only can our strange necessities be supplied. You must buy for me, if you please, a cuckoo clock; and now I will tell you where they are sold, which, Londoner as you are, it is possible you may not know. They are sold, I am informed, at more houses than one, in that narrow part of Holborn which leads into broad St Giles'. It seems they are well going clocks, and cheap, which are the two best recommendations of any clock. They are made in Germany, and such numbers of them are annually imported, that they are become even a considerable article of commerce.

I return you many thanks for Boswell's Tour. I read it to Mrs Unwin after supper, and we find it amusing. There is much trash in it, as there must always be in every narrative that relates indiscriminately all that passed. But now and then the Doctor speaks like an oracle, and that makes amends for all. Sir John was a coxcomb, and Boswell is not less a coxcomb, though of another kind. I fancy Johnson made coxcombs of all his friends, and they in return made him a coxcomb; for, with reverence be it spoken, such he certainly was, and, flattered as he was, he was sure to be so.

Thanks for your invitation to London, but unless London can come to me, I fear we shall never meet. I was sure that you would love my friend, when you should once be well acquainted with him; and equally sure that he would take kindly to you.

Now for Homer. W. C.

300. — TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

CONGRATULATORY ON HIS MARRIAGE.

WESTON, *June* 16, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You will naturally suppose that the letter in which you announced your marriage occasioned me

* For the character and writings of the Duncombes, see Life.

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some concern, though in my answer I had the wisdom to conceal it. The account you gave me of the object of your choice, was such as left me at liberty to form conjectures not very comfortable to myself, if my friendship for you were indeed sincere. I have since, however, been sufficiently consoled. Your brother Chester has informed me, that you have married not only one of the most agreeable, but one of the most accomplished women in the kingdom. It is an old maxim, that it is better to exceed expectation than to disappoint it, and with this maxim in your view, it was, no doubt, that you dwelt only on circumstances of disadvantage, and would not treat me with a recital of others which abundantly overweigh them. I now congratulate not you only, but myself, and truly rejoice that my friend has chosen for his fellow-traveller through the remaining stages of his journey, a companion who will do honour to his discernment, and make his way, so far as it can depend on a wife to do so, pleasant to the last.

My verses on the Queen's visit to London either have been printed, or soon will be, in the World. The finishing to which you objected, I have altered, and have substituted two new stanzas instead of it. Two others also I have struck out, another critic having objected to *them*. I think I am a very tractable sort of a poet. Most of my fraternity would as soon shorten the noses of their children because they were said to be too long, as thus dock their compositions in compliance with the opinion of others. I beg that when my life shall be written hereafter, my authorship's ductability of temper may not be forgotten! I am, my dear friend, ever yours. W. C.

301.—SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR AN INTERVIEW—LIVES OF JOHNSON.

THE LODGE, *June* 20, 1789.

AMICO MIO,—I am truly sorry that it must be so long before we can have an opportunity to meet. My cousin, in her last letter but one, inspired me with other expectations, expressing a purpose, if the matter could be so contrived, of bringing you with her; I was willing to believe that you had consulted together on the subject, and found it feasible. A month was formerly a trifle in my account, but at my present age I give

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it all its importance, and grudge that so many months should yet pass, in which I have not even a glimpse of those I love, and of whom, the course of nature considered, I must ere long take leave for ever — but I shall live till August.

Many thanks for the cuckoo, which arrived perfectly safe, and goes well, to the amusement and amazement of all who hear it. Hannah lies awake to hear it, and I am not sure that we have not others in the house that admire his music as much as she.

Having read both Hawkins* and Boswell,† I now think myself almost as much a master of Johnson's character, as if I had known him personally, and cannot but regret *that our bards of other times* found no such biographers as these. They have both been ridiculed, and the wits have had their laugh; but such a history of Milton or Shakespeare, as they have given of Johnson — oh, how desirable!

302.—TO MRS THROCKMORTON.

DOMESTIC INCIDENTS.

July 18, 1789.

MANY thanks, my dear madam, for your extract from George's letter. I retain but little Italian, yet that little was so forcibly mustered by the consciousness that I was myself the subject, that I presently became master of it. I have always said that George is a poet, and I am never in his company but I discover proofs of it; and the delicate address by which he has managed his complimentary mention of me, convinces me of it still more than ever. Here are a thousand poets of us, who have impudence enough to write for the public; but amongst the modest men who are by diffidence restrained from such an enterprise are those who would eclipse us all. I wish that George would make the experiment; I would bind on his laurels with my own hand.

* Sir John Hawkins, author of a General History of Music, and a Life of Dr Johnson, of whom he was the intimate friend, and the first editor of his collected works. He died a few months after the date of this letter, having been born in London, 1719. Sir John thinks vigorously, but his style is harsh and slovenly.

† Besides his admirable life of the great lexicographer, Boswell wrote a History of Corsica, and Memoirs of General Paoli, a pamphlet on the celebrated Douglas Cause, Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, the Hypochondriac, and some fugitive pieces. Born 1740, died 1795.

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Your gardener has gone after his wife, but having neglected to take his lyre, *alias* fiddle, with him, has not yet brought home his Eurydice. Your clock in the hall has stopped, and (strange to tell!) it stopped at sight of the watchmaker. For he only looked at it, and it has been motionless ever since. Mr Gregson is gone, and the Hall is a desolation. Pray don't think any place pleasant that you may find in your rambles, that we may see you the sooner. Your aviary is all in good health. I pass it every day, and often inquire at the lattice; the inhabitants of it send their duty, and wish for your return. I took notice of the inscription on your seal, and had we an artist here capable of furnishing me with another, you should read on mine, *Encore une lettre.*—Adieu, W. C.

303. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

EARLY IMPROVEMENT OF LIFE — INVITATION TO WESTON.

THE LODGE, *July* 23, 1789.

You do well, my dear sir, to improve your opportunity; to speak in the rural phrase, this is your sowing time, and the sheaves you look for can never be yours unless you make that use of it. The colour of our whole life is generally such as the three or four first years, in which we are our own masters, make it. Then it is that we may be said to shape our own destiny, and to treasure up for ourselves a series of future successes or disappointments. Had I employed my time as wisely as you, in a situation very similar to yours, I had never been a poet perhaps, but I might by this time have acquired a character of more importance in society; and a situation in which my friends would have been better pleased to see me. But three years misspent in an attorney's office were almost of course followed by several more equally misspent in the Temple, and the consequence has been, as the Italian epitaph says, "*Sto qui.*" The only use I can make of myself now, at least the best, is to serve *in terrorem* to others, when occasion may happen to offer, that they may escape (so far as my admonitions can have any weight with them) my folly and my fate. When you feel yourself tempted to relax a little of the strictness of your present discipline, and to indulge in amusement incompatible with your future interests think on your friend at Weston.

Having said this, I shall next with my whole heart invite you hither, and assure you that I look forward to approaching

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August with great pleasure, because it promises me your company. After a little time (which we shall wish longer) spent with us, you will return invigorated to your studies, and pursue them with the more advantage. In the meantime you have lost little, in point of season, by being confined to London. Incessant rains, and meadows under water, have given to the summer the air of winter, and the country has been deprived of half its beauties.

It is time to tell you that we are all well, and often make you our subject. This is the third meeting that my cousin and we have had in this country; and a great instance of good fortune I account it in such a world as this, to have expected such a pleasure thrice without being once disappointed. Add to this wonder as soon as you can by making yourself of the party.—

W. C.

304. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

MRS PIOZZI'S TRAVELS — MERCIFUL CRITICISM.

WESTON, *August* 8, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — Come when you will, or when you can, you cannot come at a wrong time, but we shall expect you on the day mentioned.

If you have any book, that you think will make pleasant evening reading, bring it with you. I now read Mrs Piozzi's Travels * to the ladies after supper, and shall probably have finished them before we shall have the pleasure of seeing you. It is the fashion, I understand, to condemn them. But we who make books ourselves are more merciful to book-makers. I would that every fastidious judge of authors were himself obliged to write; there goes more to the composition of a volume than many critics imagine. I have often wondered that the same poet who wrote the Dunciad should have written these lines, —

> The mercy I to others shew,
> That mercy shew to me.

Alas for Pope! if the mercy he shewed to others was the measure of the mercy he received! He was the less

* Mrs Piozzi's maiden name was Salisbury. She was born in Carnarvonshire, in 1739, married Dr Johnson's friend, Thrale, in her twenty-fourth year. On a second marriage with Signor Piozzi, she went to reside in Florence, and died at Clifton in 1821. A miscellaneous writer, lively and not uninformed.

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pardonable, too, because experienced in all the difficulties of composition.

I scratch this between dinner and tea; a time when I cannot write much without disordering my noddle, and bringing a flush into my face. You will excuse me therefore if, through respect for the two important considerations of health and beauty, I conclude myself, ever yours, W. C.

305. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

NOTE ON HIS DEPARTURE.

WESTON, *September* 24, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — You left us exactly at the wrong time. Had you staid till now, you would have had the pleasure of hearing even my cousin say —"I am cold." And the still greater pleasure of being warm yourself; for I have had a fire in the study ever since you went. It is the fault of our summers, that they are hardly ever warm or cold enough. Were they warmer, we should not want a fire; and were they colder, we should have one.

I have twice seen and conversed with Mr J———. He is witty, intelligent, and agreeable beyond the common measure of men who are so. But it is the constant effect of a spirit of party to make those hateful to each other, who are truly amiable in themselves.

Beau sends his love; he was melancholy the whole day after your departure. W. C.

306. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

THANKS FOR A PRESENT — VILLOISON'S HOMER.

WESTON, *October* 4, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The hamper is come, and come safe; and the contents I can affirm on my own knowledge are excellent. It chanced that another hamper and a box came by the same conveyance, all which I unpacked and expounded in the hall; my cousin sitting, meantime, on the stairs, spectatress of the business. We diverted ourselves with imagining the manner in which Homer would have described the scene. Detailed in his circumstantial way, it would have furnished materials for a paragraph of considerable length in an Odyssey.

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The straw-stuff'd hamper with his ruthless steel
He open'd, cutting sheer th' inserted cords,
Which bound the lid and lip secure. Forth came
The rustling package first, bright straw of wheat,
Or oats, or barley; next a bottle green
Throat-full, clear spirits the contents, distill'd
Drop after drop odorous, by the art
Of the fair mother of his friend, — the Rose.

And so on. I should rejoice to be the hero of such a tale in the hands of Homer.

You will remember, I trust, that when the state of your health or spirits calls for rural walks and fresh air, you have always a retreat at Wetson.

We are well, all love you, down to the very dog; and shall be glad to hear that you have exchanged languor for alacrity, and the debility that you mention, for indefatigable vigour.

Mr Throckmorton has made me a handsome present; Villoison's* edition of the Iliad, elegantly bound by Edwards. If I live long enough, by the contributions of my friends I shall once more be possessed of a library. — Adieu,

W. C.

307. — TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.

Weston, *December* 18, 1789.

My dear Friend, — The present appears to me a wonderful period in the history of mankind. That nations so long contentedly slaves should on a sudden become enamoured of liberty, and understand, as suddenly, their own natural right to it, feeling themselves at the same time inspired with resolutions to assert it, seems difficult to account for from natural causes. With respect to the final issue of all this, I can only say, that if, having discovered the value of liberty, they should next discover the value of peace, and lastly the value of the word of God, they will be happier than they ever were since the rebellion of the first pair, and as happy as it is possible they should be in the present life. — Most sincerely yours,

W. C.

* Jean Baptist d'Ausse de Villoison, a celebrated linguist, was born at Corbeil, 1750, and died professor of Greek in the College of France. He travelled in early life in search of ancient MSS. and while residing in Venice, published the splendid, learned, but often fanciful, work mentioned in the text.

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308. — TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

ENGAGEMENTS THE CAUSE OF HIS SILENCE — VILLOISON

My dear Walter, — I know that you are too reasonable a man to expect any thing like punctuality of correspondence from a translator of Homer, especially from one who is a doer also of many other things at the same time; for I labour hard not only to acquire a little fame for myself, but to win it also for others — men of whom I know nothing, not even their names,—who send me their poetry, that by translating it out of prose into verse, I may make it more like poetry than it was. Having heard all this, you will feel yourself not only inclined to pardon my long silence, but to pity me also for the cause of it. You may if you please believe likewise, for it is true, that I have a faculty of remembering my friends even when I do not write to them, and of loving them not one jot the less, though I leave them to starve for want of a letter from me. And now I think you have an apology both as to style, matter, and manner, altogether unexceptionable. Why is the winter like a backbiter? Because Solomon says that a backbiter separates between chief friends, and so does the winter: to this dirty season it is owing, that I see nothing of the valuable Chesters, whom indeed I see less at all times than serves at all to content me. I hear of them indeed occasionally from my neighbours at the Hall, but even of that comfort I have lately enjoyed less than usual, Mr Throckmorton having been hindered by his first fit of the gout from his usual visits to Chicheley. The gout, however, has not prevented his making me a handsome present of a folio edition of the Iliad, published about a year since at Venice, by a literato, who calls himself Villoison. It is possible that you have seen it, and that if you have it not yourself, it has at least found its way to Lord Bagot's library. If neither should be the case, when I write next (for sooner or later I shall certainly write to you again if I live) I will send you some pretty stories out of his Prolegomena, which will make your hair stand on end, as mine has stood on end already, they so horribly affect, in point of authenticity, the credit of the works of the immortal Homer.

Wishing you and Mrs Bagot all the happiness that a new year can possibly bring with it, I remain, with Mrs Unwin's best respects, yours, my dear friend, with all sincerity, W. C.

My paper mourns for the death of Lord Cowper, my valuable cousin, and much my benefactor.

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309.—TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

HOMER IMPERFECTLY UNDERSTOOD BY HIS COUNTRYMEN — CALLIMACHUS — COLLECTION OF THE HOMERIC POEMS BY PISISTRATUS.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am a terrible creature for not writing sooner, but the old excuse must serve, at least I will not occupy paper with the addition of others unless you should insist on it, in which case I can assure you that I have them ready. Now to business.

From Villoison I learn that it was the avowed opinion and persuasion of Callimachus * (whose hymns we both studied at Westminster) that Homer was very imperfectly understood even in *his* day: that his admirers, deceived by the perspicuity of his style, fancied themselves masters of his meaning, when in truth they knew little about it.

Now we know that Callimachus, as I have hinted, was himself a poet, and a good one: he was also esteemed a good critic; he almost, if not actually, adored Homer, and imitated him as nearly as he could.

What shall we say to this? I will tell you what I say to it. Callimachus meant, and he could mean nothing more, by this assertion, than that the poems of Homer were in fact an allegory; that under the obvious import of his stories lay concealed a mystic sense, sometimes philosophical, sometimes religious, sometimes moral, and that the generality either wanted penetration or industry, or had not been properly qualified by their studies, to discover it. This I can readily believe, for I am myself an ignoramus in these points, and except here and there, discern nothing more than the letter. But if Callimachus will tell me that even of *that* I am ignorant, I hope soon by two great volumes to convince him of the contrary.

I learn also from the same Villoison, that Pisistratus,† who was a sort of Mecænas in Athens, where he gave great

* Callimachus, a voluminous writer, though a few only of his odes are extant, born at Cyrene, and flourished at the court of Alexandria, under Ptolemy Philadelphus.

† Pisistratus, just, enlightened, liberal, and learned, whom the mob of Athens, according to their usual practice with those of whose superiority they were ashamed, expelled as a tyrant, died B.C. 527. The nature and extent of his connection with the poems of Homer, is an infinitely more difficult question than Cowper here represents.

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encouragement to literature, and built and furnished a public library, regretting that there was no complete copy of Homer's works in the world, resolved to make one. For this purpose he advertised rewards in all the newspapers, to those who, being possessed memoriter of any part or parcel of the poems of that bard, would resort to his house, and repeat them to his secretaries, that they might write them. Now it happened that more were desirous of the reward, than qualified to deserve it. The consequence was, that the nonqualified persons, having many of them a pretty knack at versification, imposed on the generous Athenian most egregiously, giving him instead of Homer's verses, which they had not to give, verses of their own invention. He, good creature, suspecting no such fraud, took them all for gospel, and entered them into his volume accordingly.

Now let *him* believe the story who can. That Homer's works were in this manner corrected I *can* believe; but that a learned Athenian could be so imposed upon, with sufficient means of detection at hand, I *cannot*. Would he not be on his guard? Would not a difference of style and manner have occurred? Would not that difference have excited a suspicion? Would not that suspicion have led to inquiry? And would not that inquiry have issued in detection? For how easy was it in the multitude of Homer-conners to find two, ten, twenty, possessed of the questionable passage, and by confronting them with the impudent impostor, to convict him? *Abeas ergo in malam rem cum istis tuis hallucinationibus, Villoisone!*—Faithfully yours, W. C.

310.—TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

HYMNS FOR CHILDREN—STATE OF HIS HEALTH—OCCUPATIONS—HOMER.

THE LODGE, *January* 3, 1790.

MY DEAR SIR,—I have been long silent, but you have had the charity, I hope and believe, not to ascribe my silence to a wrong cause. The truth is, I have been too busy to write to any body, having been obliged to give my early mornings to the revisal and correction of a little volume of Hymns for Children, written by I know not whom. This task I finished but yesterday, and while it was in hand, wrote only to my cousin, and to her rarely. From her, however, I knew that you would hear of my well being, which made me less anxious about my debts to you than I could have been otherwise.

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I am almost the only person at Weston known to you who have enjoyed tolerable health this winter. In your next letter give us some account of your own state of health, for I have had many anxieties about you. The winter has been mild; but our winters are in general such, that when a friend leaves us in the beginning of that season, I always feel in my heart a *perhaps*, importing that we have possibly met for the last time, and that the robins may whistle on the grave of one of us before the return of summer.

I am still thrumming Homer's lyre: that is to say, I am still employed in my last revisal; and to give you some idea of the intenseness of my toils, I will inform you that it cost me all the morning yesterday, and all the evening, to translate a single simile to my mind. The transitions from one member of the subject to another, though easy and natural in the Greek, turn out often so intolerably awkward in an English version, that almost endless labour, and no little address, are requisite to give them grace and elegance. I forget if I told you that your German Clavis has been of considerable use to me. I am indebted to it for a right understanding of the manner in which Achilles prepared pork, mutton, and goat's flesh, for the entertainment of his friends, in the night when they came deputed by Agamemnon to negociate a reconciliation,—a passage of which nobody in the world is perfectly master, myself only and Schaulfelbergerus excepted, nor ever was, except when Greek was a *live* language.

I do not know whether my cousin has told you or not how I brag in my letters to her concerning my Translation; perhaps her modesty feels more for me than mine for myself, and she would blush to let even you know the degree of my self-conceit on that subject. I will tell you, however, expressing myself as decently as vanity will permit, that it has undergone such a change for the better in this last revisal, that I have much warmer hopes of success than formerly.—Yours,

W. C.

311.—TO LADY HESKETH.

HIS KINSMAN'S POEM—CAMBRIDGE CRITICS ON HOMER.

THE LODGE, *January* 23, 1790.

MY DEAR COZ,—I had a letter yesterday from the wild boy Johnson, for whom I have conceived a great affection. It was just such a letter as I like, of the true helter-skelter kind; and, though he writes a remarkably good hand, scribbled with such rapidity that it was barely legible. He gave me a droll

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account of the adventures of Lord Howard's note, and of his own in pursuit of it. The poem he brought me came as from Lord Howard, with his lordship's request that I would revise it. It is in the form of a pastoral, and is entitled "*The Tale of the Lute; or, The Beauties of Audley End.*" I read it attentively; was much pleased with part of it, and part of it I equally disliked. I told him so, and in such terms as one naturally uses when there seems to be no occasion to qualify or to alleviate censure. I observed him afterwards somewhat more thoughtful and silent, but occasionally as pleasant as usual; and in Kilwick wood, where we walked the next day, the truth came out that he was himself the author; and that Lord Howard not approving it altogether, and several friends of his own age, to whom he had shewn it, differing from his lordship in opinion, and being highly pleased with it, he had come at last to a resolution to abide by my judgment; a measure to which Lord Howard by all means advised him. He accordingly brought it, and will bring it again in the summer, when we shall lay our heads together and try to mend it.

I have lately had a letter also from Mrs King, to whom I had written to inquire whether she were living or dead. She tells me the critics expect from my Homer every thing in some parts, and that in others I shall fall short. These are the Cambridge critics; and she has her intelligence from the botanical professor, Martyn.* That gentleman in reply answers them, that I shall fall short in nothing, but shall disappoint them all. It shall be my endeavour to do so, and I am not without hope of succeeding. W. C.

312.—TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

HEYNE'S HOMER — DR BENTLEY'S OPINION THAT THE LAST BOOK OF THE ODYSSEY IS SPURIOUS.

THE LODGE, *February* 2, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — Should Heyne's† Homer appear before mine, which I hope is not probable, and should he

* Thomas Martyn, Professor of Botany at Cambridge, where he succeeded his father, John Martyn, the translator of Virgil's Georgics. He wrote various works, and died in 1825.

† Heyne Christian Gottolb, a most remarkable instance of perseverance. Born in the lowest rank of a Hungarian peasant, in 1729, he died Professor of Rhetoric at Gottingen, in 1812, with the reputation of being the most eminent classic in Europe. His works, besides notes to Homer, Pindar, Epictetus, Diodorus Siculus, Virgil, and Tibullus, have been published in six volumes, octavo.

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adopt in it the opinion of Bentley, that the whole last Odyssey is spurious, I will dare to contradict both him and the Doctor. I am only in part of Bentley's mind (if indeed his mind were such) in this matter, and giant as he was in learning, and eagle-eyed in criticism, am persuaded, convinced, and sure (can I be more positive?) that, except from the moment when the Ithacans begin to meditate an attack on the cottage of Laertes, and thence to the end, that book is the work of Homer. From the moment aforesaid, I yield the point, or rather have never, since I had any skill in Homer, felt myself at all inclined to dispute it. But I believe perfectly at the same time, that, Homer himself alone excepted, the Greek poet never existed who could have written the speeches made by the shade of Agamemnon, in which there is more insight into the human heart discovered than I ever saw in any other work, unless in Shakespeare. I am equally disposed to fight for the whole passage that describes Laertes, and the interview between him and Ulysses. Let Bentley grant these to Homer, and I will shake hands with him as to all the rest. The battle with which the book concludes is, I think, a paltry battle, and there is a huddle in the management of it altogether unworthy of my favourite, and the favourite of all ages.

If you should happen to fall into company with Dr Warton again, you will not, I dare say, forget to make him my respectful compliments, and to assure him that I felt myself not a little flattered by the favourable mention he was pleased to make of me and my labours. The poet who pleases a man like him has nothing left to wish for. I am glad that you were pleased with my young cousin Johnson; he is a boy, and bashful, but has great merit in respect both of character and intellect; so far at least as in a week's knowledge of him I could possibly learn. He is very amiable, and very sensible, and inspired me with a warm wish to know him better.

W. C.

313.—TO LADY HESKETH.

HIS KINSMAN JOHNSON — ODES OF HORACE DISCOVERED.

THE LODGE, *February* 9, 1790.

I HAVE sent you lately scraps instead of letters, having had occasion to answer immediately on the receipt, which always happens while I am *deep in Homer*.

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I knew when I recommended Johnson to you that you would find some way to serve him, and so it has happened, for, notwithstanding your own apprehensions to the contrary, you have already procured him a chaplainship. This is pretty well, considering that it is an early day, and that you have but just begun to know that there is such a man under heaven. I had rather myself be patronized by a person of small interest, with a heart like yours, than by the Chancellor himself, if he did not care a farthing for me.

If I did not desire you to make my acknowledgments to Anonymous, as I believe I did not, it was because I am not aware that I am warranted to do so. But the omission is of less consequence, because, whoever he is, though he has no objection to doing the kindest things, he seems to have an aversion to the thanks they merit.

You must know that two odes, composed by Horace, have lately been discovered at Rome; I wanted them transcribed into the blank leaves of a little Horace of mine, and Mrs Throckmorton performed that service for me; in a blank leaf, therefore, of the same book I wrote the following.*

W. C.

TO MRS THROCKMORTON,

ON HER BEAUTIFUL TRANSCRIPT OF HORACE'S ODE, AD LIBRUM SUUM.

Maria, could Horace have guess'd
What honours awaited his ode
To his own little volume address'd,
The honour which you have bestow'd,
Who have traced it in characters here,
So elegant, even, and neat;
He had laugh'd at the critical sneer,
Which he seems to have trembled to meet.

And sneer, if you please, he had said,
Hereafter a nymph shall arise,
Who shall give me, when you are all dead,
The glory your malice denies;
Shall dignity give to my lay,
Although but a mere bagatelle;
And even a poet shall say,
Nothing ever was written so well.

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314. — TO MR JOHNSON, (PRINTER.)

NOTE — FUSELI'S REMARKS ON HOMER.

WESTON, *February* 11, 1790.

DEAR SIR, — I am very sensibly obliged by the remarks of Mr Fuseli, and beg that you will tell him so: they afford me opportunities of improvement which I shall not neglect. When he shall see the press copy he will be convined of this; and will be convinced likewise that, smart as he sometimes is, he spares me often when I have no mercy on myself. He will see almost a new translation. * * * I assure you faithfully, that whatever my faults may be, to be easily or hastily satisfied with what I have written, is not one of them.

315. — TO LADY HESKETH.

TRANSLATION OF HOMER TO BE SUBMITTED TO HER FRIEND — HIS MOTHER'S PICTURE.

THE LODGE, *February* 26, 1790.

YOU have set my heart at ease, my cousin, so far as you were yourself the object of its anxieties. What other troubles it feels can be cured by God alone. But you are never silent a week longer than usual, without giving an opportunity to my imagination (ever fruitful in flowers of a sable hue) to tease me with them day and night. London is indeed a pestilent place, as you call it, and I would, with all my heart, that thou hadst less to do with it; were you under the same roof with me, I should know you to be safe, and should never distress you with melancholy letters.

I feel myself well enough inclined to the measure you propose, and will shew to your new acquaintance, with all my heart, a sample of my translation, but it shall not, if you please, be taken from the Odyssey. It is a poem of a gentler character than the Iliad, and as I propose to carry her by a *coup de main*, I shall employ Achilles, Agamemnon, and the two armies of Greece and Troy in my service. I will accordingly send you, in the box that I received from you last night, the two first books of the Iliad for that lady's perusal; to those I have given a third revisal; for them therefore I will be answerable, and am not afraid to stake the credit of my work upon *them* with her, or with any living wight, especially one

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who understands the original. I do not mean that even they are finished, for I shall examine and cross-examine them yet again, and so you may tell her, but I know that they will not disgrace me; whereas it is so long since I have looked at the Odyssey that I know nothing at all about it. They shall set sail from Olney on Monday morning in the Diligence, and will reach you I hope in the evening. As soon as she has done with them, I shall be glad to have them again, for the time draws near when I shall want to give them the last touch.

I am delighted with Mrs Bodham's kindness in giving me the only picture of my own mother that is to be found, I suppose, in all the world. I had rather possess it than the richest jewel in the British crown, for I loved her with an affection that her death, fifty-two years since, has not in the least abated. I remember her, too, young as I was when she died, well enough to know that it is a very exact resemblance of her, and as such it is to me invaluable. Every body loved her, and with an amiable character so impressed upon all her features, every body was sure to do so.

I have a very affectionate and a very clever letter from Johnson, who promises me the transcript of the books intrusted to him in a few days. I have a great love for that young man; he has some drops of the same stream in his veins that once animated the original of that dear picture. W. C.

316. — TO MRS BODHAM.*

THANKS FOR HER PRESENT OF HIS MOTHER'S PICTURE—REMINISCENCES.

WESTON, *February* 27, 1790.

MY DEAREST ROSE, — Whom I thought withered and fallen from the stalk, but whom I find still alive: nothing could give me greater pleasure than to know it, and to learn it from yourself. I loved you dearly when you were a child, and love you not a jot the less for having ceased to be so. Every creature that bears any affinity to my own mother is dear to me, and you, the daughter of her brother, are but one remove distant from her: I love you, therefore, and love you much, both for her sake and for your own. The world could not have furnished you with a present so acceptable to me as the picture which you have so kindly sent me. I received it the

* Formerly Miss Anne Donne, to whom the poet, nearly thirty years before, had given the name of Rose, from her beauty when a girl.

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night before last, and viewed it with a trepidation of nerves and spirits somewhat akin to what I should have felt had the dear original presented herself to my embraces. I kissed it, and hung it where it is the last object that I see at night, and of course the first on which I open my eyes in the morning. She died when I had completed my sixth year; yet I remember her well, and am an ocular witness of the great fidelity of the copy. I remember, too, a multitude of the maternal tendernesses which I received from her, and which have endeared her memory to me beyond expression. There is in me, I believe, more of the Donne than of the Cowper; and though I love all of both names, and have a thousand reasons to love those of my own name, yet I feel the bond of nature draw me vehemently to your side. I was thought in the days of my childhood much to resemble my mother, and in my natural temper, of which at the age of fifty-eight I must be supposed a competent judge, can trace both her, and my late uncle, your father. Somewhat of his irritability, and a little I would hope both of his and of her ——, I know not what to call it, without seeming to praise myself, which is not my intention, but speaking to *you*, I will even speak out, and say, *good nature*. Add to all this, I deal much in poetry, as did our venerable ancestor, the Dean of St Paul's, and I think I shall have proved myself a Donne at all points. The truth is, that, whatever I am, I love you all.

I account it a happy event that brought the dear boy, your nephew, to my knowledge, and that, breaking through all the restraints which his natural bashfulness imposed on him, he determined to find me out. He is amiable to a degree that I have seldom seen, and I often long with impatience to see him again.

My dearest cousin, what shall I say in answer to your affectionate invitation? I *must* say this, I cannot come now, nor soon, and I wish with all my heart I could. But I will tell you what may be done perhaps, and it will answer to us just as well: you and Mr Bodham can come to Weston, can you not? The summer is at hand, there are roads and wheels to bring you, and you are neither of you translating Homer. I am crazed that I cannot ask you all together for want of house-room; but for Mr Bodham and yourself we have good room, and equally good for any third, in the shape of a Donne, whether named Hewitt, Bodham, Balls, or Johnson, or by whatever name distinguished. Mrs Hewitt has particular claims upon me; she was my playfellow at Berkhampstead,

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and has a share in my warmest affections. Pray tell her so. Neither do I at all forget my cousin Harriet. She and I have been many a time merry at Catfield, and have made the parsonage ring with laughter. Give my love to her. Assure yourself, my dearest cousin, that I shall receive you as if you were my sister; and Mrs Unwin is, for my sake, prepared to do the same. When she has seen you, she will love you for your own.

I am much obliged to Mr Bodham for his kindness to my Homer, and with my love to you all, and with Mrs Unwin's kind respects, am, my dear, dear Rose, ever yours, W. C.

P.S.—I mourn the death of your poor brother Castres, whom I should have seen had he lived, and should have seen with the greatest pleasure. He was an amiable boy, and I was very fond of him.

Still another P.S.—I find on consulting Mrs Unwin, that I have underrated our capabilities, and that we have not only room for you and Mr Bodham, but for two of your sex, and even for your nephew into the bargain. We shall be happy to have it all so occupied.

Your nephew tells me that his sister, in the qualities of the mind, resembles you; that is enough to make her dear to me, and I beg you will assure her that she is so. Let it not be long before I hear from you.

317.—TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

MRS BODHAM'S PRESENT—INVITATION INTO NORFOLK.

WESTON, *February* 28, 1790.

MY DEAR COUSIN JOHN,—I have much wished to hear from you; and though you are welcome to write to Mrs Unwin as often as you please, I wish myself to be numbered among your correspondents.

I shall find time to answer you, doubt it not. Be as busy as we may, we can always find time to do what is agreeable to us. By the way, had you a letter from Mrs Unwin? I am witness that she addressed one to you before you went into Norfolk; but your mathematico-poetical head forgot to acknowledge the receipt of it.

I was never more pleased in my life than to learn, and to learn from herself, that my dearest Rose is still alive. Had

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she not engaged me to love her by the sweetness of her character when a child, she would have done it effectually now, by making me the most acceptable present in the world, my own dear mother's picture. I am perhaps the only person living who remembers her, but I remember her well, and can attest, on my own knowledge, the truth of the resemblance. Amiable and elegant as the countenance is, such exactly was her own; she was one of the tenderest parents, and so just a copy of her is therefore to me invaluable.

I wrote yesterday to my Rose to tell her all this, and to thank her for her kindness in sending it. Neither do I forget your kindness, who intimated to her that I should be happy to possess it.

She invites me into Norfolk, but, alas! she might as well invite the house in which I dwell; for all other considerations and impediments apart, how is it possible that a translator of Homer should lumber to such a distance! But though I cannot comply with her kind invitation, I have made myself the best amends in my power, by inviting her, and all the family of Donnes, to Weston. Perhaps we could not accommodate them all at once, but in succession we could; and can at any time find room for five, three of them being females, and one a married one. You are a mathematician; tell me, then, how five persons can be lodged in three beds, (two males and three females,) and I shall have good hope that you will proceed a senior optime. It would make me happy to see our house so furnished. As to yourself, whom I know to be a *subscalarian*, or a man that sleeps under the stairs, I should have no objection at all, neither could you possibly have any yourself, to the garret, as a place in which you might be disposed of with great felicity of accommodation.

I thank you much for your services in the transcribing way, and would by no means have you despair of an opportunity to serve me in the same way yet again. Write to me soon, and tell me when I shall see you.

I have not said the half that I have to say, but breakfast is at hand, which always terminates my epistles.

What have you done with your poem? The trimming that it procured you here has not, I hope, put you out of conceit with it entirely: you are more than equal to the alteration that it needs. Only remember that, in writing, perspicuity is always more than half the battle. The want of it is the ruin of more than half the poetry that is published. A meaning that does not stare you in the face is as bad as no meaning,

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because nobody will take the pains to poke for it. So now adieu for the present. Beware of killing yourself with problems; for if you do, you will never live to be another Sir Isaac.

Mrs Unwin's affectionate remembrances attend you; Lady Hesketh is much disposed to love you; perhaps most who know you have some little tendency the same way.

318.—TO LADY HESKETH.

MRS CARTER'S OPINION OF HIS HOMER—TEST ACT.

THE LODGE, *March* 8, 1790.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—I thank thee much, and oft, for negociating so well this poetical concern with Mrs [Carter,] and for sending me her opinion in her own hand. I should be unreasonable indeed not to be highly gratified by it, and I like it the better for being modestly expressed. It is, as you know, and it shall be some months longer, my daily business to polish and improve what is done, that when the whole shall appear she may find her expectations answered. I am glad also that thou didst send her the sixteenth Odyssey, though, as I said before, I know not at all at present whereof it is made; but I am sure that thou wouldst not have sent it, hadst thou not conceived a good opinion of it thyself, and thought that it would do me credit. It was very kind in thee to sacrifice to this Minerva on my account.

For my sentiments on the subject of the Test Act, I cannot do better than refer thee to my poem, entitled and called, "Expostulation." I have there expressed myself not much in its favour, considering it in a religious view; and in a political one, I like it not a jot the better. I am neither Tory nor High Churchman, but an old Whig, as my father was before me; and an enemy consequently to all tyrannical impositions.

Mrs Unwin bids me return thee many thanks for thy inquiries so kindly made concerning her health. She is a little better than of late, but has been ill continually ever since last November. Every thing that could try patience and submission she has had, and her submission and patience have answered in the trial, though mine on her account have often failed sadly.

I have a letter from Johnson, who tells me that he has sent his transcript to you, begging, at the same time, more

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copy. Let him have it by all means; he is an industrious youth, and I love him dearly. I told him that you are disposed to love him a little. A new poem is born on the receipt of my mother's picture. Thou shalt have it.* W. C.

319. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

OUR REAL STATE OF HEALTH NOT TO BE CONCEALED FROM FRIENDS.

THE LODGE, *March* 11, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I was glad to hear from you, for a line from you gives me always much pleasure, but was not much gladdened by the contents of your letter. The state of your health, which I have learned more accurately perhaps from my cousin, except in this last instance, than from yourself, has alarmed me, and even she has collected her information upon that subject more from your looks, than from your own acknowledgments. To complain much and often of our indispositions, does not always ensure the pity of the hearer, perhaps sometimes forfeits it; but to dissemble them altogether, or at least to suppress the worst, is attended ultimately with an inconvenience greater still; the secret will out at last, and our friends, unprepared to receive it, are doubly distressed about us. In saying this, I squint a little at Mrs Unwin, who will read it; it is with her, as with you, the only subject on which she practises any dissimulation at all: the consequence is, that when she is much indisposed, I never believe myself in possession of the whole truth, live in constant expectation of hearing something worse, and at the long run am seldom disappointed. It seems, therefore, as on all other occasions, so even in this, the better course on the whole to appear what we are; not to lay the fears of our friends asleep by cheerful looks, which do not properly belong to us, or by letters written as if we were well, when in fact we are very much otherwise. On condition, however, that you act differently toward me for the future, I will pardon the past, and she may gather from my clemency shewn to you, some hopes, on the same conditions, of similar clemency to herself. W. C.

* See Poems.

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320. — TO MRS THROCKMORTON.

REGRETTING HER ABSENCE — MRS CARTER'S OPINION OF HOMER.

THE LODGE, *March* 21, 1790.

MY DEAREST MADAM, — I shall only observe on the subject of your absence, that you have stretched it since you went, and have made it a week longer. Weston is sadly *unked* without you; and here are two of us, who will be heartily glad to see you again. I believe you are happier at home than any where, which is a comfortable belief to your neighbours, because it affords assurance that since you are neither likely to ramble for pleasure, nor to meet with any avocations of business, while Weston shall continue to be your home, it will not often want you.

The two first books of my Iliad have been submitted to the inspection and scrutiny of a great critic of your sex, at the instance of my cousin, as you may suppose. The lady is mistress of more tongues than a few, (it is hoped she is single,) and particularly she is mistress of the Greek. She returned them with expressions that, if any thing could make a poet prouder than all poets naturally are, would have made me so. I tell you this, because I know that you all interest yourselves in the success of the said Iliad.*

My periwig is arrived, and is the very perfection of all periwigs, having only one fault; which is, that my head will only go into the first half of it, the other half, or the upper part of it, continuing still unoccupied. My artist in this way at Olney has, however, undertaken to make the whole of it tenantable, and then I shall be twenty years younger than you have ever seen me.

I heard of your birthday very early in the morning; the news came from the steeple. W. C.

* Either this letter is wrong dated, or Cowper forgot that Lady Hesketh had informed him of her having sent the sixteenth book of the Odyssey to Mrs Carter. Letter 318.

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321. — TO LADY HESKETH.

THE LOSS AND RECOVERY OF PART OF HIS MANUSCRIPT CONSIDERED A GOOD OMEN — THE STYLE ADOPTED IN HIS TRANSLATION OF HOMER.

THE LODGE, *March* 22, 1790.

I REJOICE, my dearest cousin, that my MSS. have roamed the earth so successfully, and have met with no disaster. The single book excepted that went to the bottom of the Thames and rose again, they have been fortunate without exception. I am not superstitious, but have nevertheless as good a right to believe that adventure an omen, and a favourable one, as Swift had to interpret, as he did, the loss of a fine fish, which he had no sooner laid on the bank, than it flounced into the water again. This he tells us himself he always considered as a type of his future disappointments; and why may not I as well consider the marvellous recovery of my lost book from the bottom of the Thames, as typical of its future prosperity? To say the truth, I have no fears now about the success of my Translation, though in time past I have had many. I knew there was a style somewhere, could I but find it, in which Homer ought to be rendered, and which alone would suit him. Long time I blundered about it, ere I could attain to any decided judgment on the matter; at first I was betrayed, by a desire of accommodating my language to the simplicity of his, into much of the quaintness that belonged to our writers of the fifteenth century. In the course of many revisals I have delivered myself from this evil, I believe, entirely; but I have done it slowly, and as a man separates himself from his mistress, when he is going to marry. I had so strong a predilection in favour of this style at first, that I was crazed to find that others were not as much enamoured with it as myself. At every passage of that sort which I obliterated, I groaned bitterly, and said to myself, I am spoiling my work to please those who have no taste for the simple graces of antiquity. But in measure as I adopted a more modern phraseology, I became a convert to their opinion, and in the last revisal, which I am now making, am not sensible of having spared a single expression of the obsolete kind. I see my work so much improved by this alteration, that I am filled with wonder at my own backwardness to assent to the necessity of it, and the more when I consider that Milton, with whose manner I account myself intimately

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acquainted, is never quaint, never twangs through the nose, but is every where grand and elegant, without resorting to musty antiquity for his beauties. On the contrary, he took a long stride forward, left the language of his own day far behind him, and anticipated the expressions of a century yet to come.

I have now, as I said, no longer any doubt of the event, but I will give thee a shilling if thou wilt tell me what I shall say in my Preface. It is an affair of much delicacy, and I have as many opinions about it as there are whims in a weathercock.

Send my MSS. and thine when thou wilt. In a day or two I shall enter on the last Iliad. When I have finished it, I shall give the Odyssey one more reading, and shall therefore shortly have occasion for the copy in thy possession; but you see that there is no need to hurry.

I leave the little space for Mrs Unwin's use, who means, I believe, to occupy it, and am evermore

Thine most truly, W. C.

Postscript, in the hand of Mrs Unwin.

You cannot imagine how much your ladyship would oblige your unworthy servant, if you would be so good to let me know in what point I differ from you. All that at present I can say is, that I will readily sacrifice my own opinion, unless I can give you a substantial reason for adhering to it.

322. — TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

COMPARISON OF THE ILIAD WITH THE ODYSSEY — THE POET'S AFFECTION FOR HIM.

WESTON, *March* 23, 1790.

YOUR MSS. arrived safe in New Norfolk Street, and I am much obliged to you for your labours. Were you now at Weston I could furnish you with employment for some weeks, and shall perhaps be equally able to do it in summer, for I have lost my best amanuensis in this place, Mr George Throckmorton, who is gone to Bath.

You are a man to be envied, who have never read the Odyssey, which is one of the most amusing story-books in the world. There is also much of the finest poetry in the world to be found in it, notwithstanding all that Longinus has

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insinuated to the contrary.* His comparison of the Iliad and Odyssey to the meridian, and to the declining sun, is pretty, but, I am persuaded, not just. The prettiness of it seduced him; he was otherwise too judicious a reader of Homer to have made it. I can find in the latter no symptoms of impaired ability, none of the effects of age; on the contrary, it seems to me a certainty, that Homer, had he written the Odyssey in his youth, could not have written it better; and if the Iliad in his old age, that he would have written it just as well. A critic would tell me, that instead of *written*, I should have said *composed*. Very likely; but I am not writing to one of that snarling generation.

My boy, I long to see thee again. It has happened some way or other, that Mrs Unwin and I have conceived a great affection for thee. That I should, is the less to be wondered at, because thou art a shred of my own mother; neither is the wonder great that she should fall into the same predicament, for she loves every thing that I love. You will observe, that your own personal right to be beloved makes no part of the consideration. There is nothing that I touch with so much tenderness as the vanity of a young man; because I know how extremely susceptible he is of impressions that might hurt him in that particular part of his composition. If you should ever prove a coxcomb, from which character you stand just now at a greater distance than any young man I know, it shall never be said that I have made you one; no, you will gain nothing by me but the honour of being much valued by a poor poet, who can do you no good while he lives, and has nothing to leave you when he dies. If you can be contented to be dear to me on these conditions, so you shall; but other terms more advantageous than these, or more inviting, none have I to propose.

Farewell. Puzzle not yourself about a subject when you write to either of us; every thing is subject enough from those we love. W. C.

* The remark of Longinus is, that the Iliad resembles the splendour of the meridian sun, the Odyssey shews the mild radiance of the same luminary near its setting.

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323.—TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

PHYSIOGNOMY—STUDIES FOR AN ASPIRANT TO THE MINISTRY.

WESTON, *April* 17, 1790.

YOUR letter that now lies before me is almost three weeks old, and therefore of full age to receive an answer, which it shall have without delay, if the interval between the present moment and that of breakfast should prove sufficient for the purpose.

Yours to Mrs Unwin was received yesterday, for which she will thank you in due time. I have also seen, and have now in my desk, your letter to Lady Hesketh; she sent it thinking that it would divert me; in which she was not mistaken. I shall tell her when I write to her next, that you long to receive a line from her. Give yourself no trouble on the subject of the politic device you saw good to recur to, when you presented me with your manuscript; it was an innocent deception, at least it could harm nobody save yourself—an effect which it did not fail to produce; and since the punishment followed it so closely, by me at least it may very well be forgiven. You ask, how I can tell that you are not addicted to practices of the deceptive kind? And certainly, if the little time that I have had to study you were alone to be considered, the question would not be unreasonable; but in general, a man who reaches my years, finds—

> That long experience does attain
> To something like prophetic strain.

I am very much of Lavater's opinion, and persuaded that faces are as legible as books, only with these circumstances to recommend them to our perusal, that they are read in much less time, and are much less likely to deceive us. Yours gave me a favourable impression of you the moment I beheld it, and though I shall not tell you in particular what I saw in it, for reasons mentioned in my last, I will add, that I have observed in you nothing since, that has not confirmed the opinion I then formed in your favour. In fact, I cannot recollect that my skill in physiognomy has ever deceived me, and I should add more on this subject, had I room.

When you have shut up your mathematical books, you must give yourself to the study of Greek; not merely that you may be able to read Homer and the other Greek classics

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with ease, but the Greek Testament, and the Greek Fathers also. Thus qualified, and by the aid of your fiddle into the bargain, together with some portion of the grace of God (without which nothing can be done) to enable you to look well to your flock, when you shall get one, you will be well set up for a parson; in which character, if I live to see you in it, I shall expect and hope that you will make a very different figure from most of your fraternity.—Ever yours, W. C.

324. — TO LADY HESKETH.

REVISAL OF HOMER.

THE LODGE, *April* 19, 1790.

MY DEAREST COZ,—I thank thee for my cousin Johnson's letter, which diverted me. I had one from him lately, in which he expressed an ardent desire of a line from you, and the delight he would feel in receiving it. I know not whether you will have the charity to satisfy his longings, but mention the matter, thinking it possible that you may. A letter from a lady to a youth immersed in mathematics must be singularly pleasant.

I am finishing Homer backward, having begun at the last book, and designing to persevere in that crab-like fashion till I arrive at the first. This may remind you, perhaps, of a certain poet's prisoner in the Bastile (thank Heaven! in the Bastile now no more) counting the nails in the door, for variety's sake, in all directions. I find so little to do in the last revisal, that I shall soon reach the Odyssey, and soon want those books of it which are in thy possession; but the two first of the Iliad, which are also in thy possession, much sooner; thou mayest therefore send them by the first fair opportunity. I am in high spirits on this subject, and think that I have at last licked the clumsy cub into a shape that will secure to it the favourable notice of the public. Let not ——— retard me, and I shall hope to get it out next winter.

I am glad that thou hast sent the General those verses on my mother's picture. They will amuse him—only I hope that he will not miss my mother-in-law, and think that she ought to have made a third. On such an occasion, it was not possible to mention her with any propriety. I rejoice at the General's recovery; may it prove a perfect one.

W. C.

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325. — TO LADY HESKETH.

NOTE — HIS "PICTURE VERSES."

WESTON, *April* 30, 1790.

To my old friend, Dr Madan, thou couldst not have spoken better than thou didst. Tell him, I beseech you, that I have not forgotten him: tell him also, that to my heart and home he will be always made welcome; nor he only, but all that are his. His judgment of my translation gave me the highest satisfaction, because I know him to be a rare old Grecian.

The General's approbation of my picture verses gave me also much pleasure. I wrote them not without tears; therefore I presume it may be that they are felt by others. Should he offer me my father's picture, I shall gladly accept of it. A melancholy pleasure is better than none, nay verily, better than most. He had a sad task imposed on him, but no man could acquit himself of such a one with more discretion, or with more tenderness. The death of the unfortunate young man reminded me of those lines in Lycidas:

> It was that fatal and perfidious bark,
> Built in th' eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark,
> That sunk so low that sacred head of thine!

How beautiful! W. C.

326. — TO MRS THROCKMORTON.

MISHAPS OF A MESSENGER — VILLAGE INCIDENTS — HIS OWN RAMBLES.

THE LODGE, *May* 10, 1790.

MY DEAR MRS FROG,* — You have by this time (I presume) heard from the Doctor, whom I desired to present to you our best affections, and to tell you that we are well. He sent an urchin, (I do not mean a hedgehog, commonly called an urchin in old times,† but a boy, commonly so called at present,) expecting that he would find you at Buckland's, whither he supposed you gone on Thursday. He sent him charged with divers articles, and among others, with letters, or, at least,

* The sportive title generally bestowed by Cowper on his amiable friends the Throckmortons.

† *Hurchin* is the name still given by the common people in the south of Scotland to the hedgehog.—S.

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with a letter; which I mention, that if the boy should be lost, together with his despatches, past all possibility of recovery, you may yet know that the Doctor stands acquitted of not writing. That he is utterly lost (that is to say, the boy, for the Doctor being the last antecedent, as the grammarians say, you might otherwise suppose that he was intended) is the more probable, because he was never four miles from his home before, having only travelled at the side of a plough-team; and when the Doctor gave him his direction to Buckland's, he asked, very naturally, if that place was in England. So what has become of him Heaven knows!

I do not know that any adventures have presented themselves since your departure, worth mentioning, except that the rabbit, that infested your wilderness, has been shot for devouring your carnations; and that I myself have been in some danger of being devoured in like manner by a great dog, namely, Pearson's. But I wrote him a letter on Friday, (I mean a letter to Pearson, not to his dog, which I mention to prevent mistakes; for the said last antecedent might occasion them in this place also,) informing him, that unless he tied up his great mastiff in the day-time, I would send him a worse thing, commonly called and known by the name of an attorney. When I go forth to ramble in the fields, I do not sally, like Don Quixote, with a purpose of encountering monsters, if any such can be found; but am a peaceable poor gentleman, and a poet, who mean nobody any harm, the fox-hunters and the two universities of this land excepted.

I cannot learn from any creature whether the Turnpike bill is alive or dead; so ignorant am I, and by such ignoramuses surrounded. But if I know little else, this at least I know, that I love you and Mr Frog; that I long for your return, and that I am, with Mrs Unwin's best affections, ever yours, W. C.

327. — TO LADY HESKETH.

NOTE — DECLINING ALL APPLICATION FOR POET-LAUREAT.

THE LODGE, *May* 28, 1790.

MY DEAREST COZ, — I thank thee for the offer of thy best services on this occasion. But Heaven guard my brows from the wreath you mention, whatever wreath beside may hereafter adorn them! It would be a leaden extinguisher

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clapped on all the fire of my genius, and I should never more produce a line worth reading. To speak seriously, it would make me miserable, and therefore I am sure that thou, of all my friends, would least wish me to wear it.

Adieu, ever thine — in Homer-hurry, W. C.

328. — TO LADY HESKETH.

APPLICATION FROM A WELSH POET.

WESTON, *June* 3, 1790.

You will wonder when I tell you, that I, even I, am considered by people, who live at a great distance, as having interest and influence sufficient to procure a place at court for those who may happen to want one. I have accordingly been applied to within these few days by a Welshman, with a wife and many children, to get him made Poet-laureat as fast as possible. If thou wouldst wish to make the world merry twice a-year, thou canst not do better than procure the office for him. I will promise thee, that he shall afford thee a hearty laugh in return, every birthday, and every new year. He is an honest man. Adieu! W. C.

329. — TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

ADVICE REGARDING HIS STUDIES.

WESTON, *June* 7, 1790.

MY DEAR JOHN, — You know my engagements, and are consequently able to account for my silence. I will not therefore waste time and paper in mentioning them, but will only say, that added to those with which you are acquainted, I have had other hinderances, such as business, and a disorder of my spirits, to which I have been all my life subject. At present I am, thank God! perfectly well, both in mind and body. Of you I am always mindful, whether I write or not, and very desirous to see you. You will remember, I hope, that you are under engagements to us, and, as soon as your Norfolk friends can spare you, will fulfil them. Give us all the time you can, and all that they can spare to us!

You never pleased me more than when you told me you had abandoned your mathematical pursuits. It grieved me to think that you were wasting your time merely to gain a little Cambridge fame, not worth your having. I cannot be contented that your renown should thrive nowhere but on the

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banks of the Cam. Conceive a nobler ambition, and never let your honour be circumscribed by the paltry dimensions of a university! It is well that you have already, as you observe, acquired sufficient information in that science, to enable you to pass creditably such examinations as I suppose you must hereafter undergo. Keep what you have gotten, and be content: more is needless.

You could not apply to a worse than I am to advise you concerning your studies. I was never a regular student myself, but lost the most valuable years of my life in an attorney's office, and in the Temple. I will not therefore give myself airs, and affect to know what I know not. The affair is of great importance to you, and you should be directed in it by a wiser than I. To speak, however, in very general terms on the subject, it seems to me that your chief concern is with history, natural philosophy, logic, and divinity. As to metaphysics, I know little about them; but the very little that I do know, has not taught me to admire them. Life is too short to afford time even for serious trifles. Pursue what you know to be attainable, make truth your object, and your studies will make you a wise man! Let your divinity, if I may advise, be the divinity of the glorious Reformation,—I mean in contradistinction to Arminianism, and all the *isms* that were ever broached in this world of error and ignorance.

The divinity of the Reformation is called Calvinism, but injuriously. It has been that of the church of Christ in all ages. It is the divinity of St Paul, and of St Paul's Master, who met him in his way to Damascus.

I have written in great haste, that I might finish if possible before breakfast. Adieu! Let us see you soon; the sooner the better. Give my love to the silent lady, the Rose, and all my friends around you. W. C.

380. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

ADVANTAGES OF EARLY MARRIAGE.

THE LODGE, *June* 8, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — Among the many who love and esteem you, there is none who rejoices more in your felicity than myself. Far from blaming, I commend you much for connecting yourself, young as you are, with a well chosen companion for life. Entering on the state with uncontami-

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nated morals, you have the best possible prospect of happiness, and will be secure against a thousand and ten thousand temptations, to which, at an early period of life, in such a Babylon as you must necessarily inhabit, you would otherwise have been exposed. I see it, too, in the light you do, as likely to be advantageous to you in your profession. Men of business have a better opinion of a candidate for employment, who is married, because he has given bond to the world, as you observe, and to himself, for diligence, industry, and attention. It is altogether, therefore, a subject of much congratulation; and mine, to which I add Mrs Unwin's, is very sincere. Samson at his marriage proposed a riddle to the Philistines. I am no Samson, neither are you a Philistine; yet expound to me the following, if you can,—

*What are they, which stand at a distance from each other, and meet without ever moving?**

Should you be so fortunate as to guess it, you may propose it to the company, when you celebrate your nuptials; and if you can win thirty changes of raiment by it, as Samson did by his, let me tell you, they will be no contemptible acquisition to a young beginner.

You will not, I hope, forget your way to Weston, in consequence of your marriage, where you and yours will be always welcome. W. C.

331. — TO LADY HESKETH.

DOMESTIC INCIDENTS — INSCRIPTIONS FOR A GROVE OF OAKS.

THE LODGE, *June* 17, 1790.

MY DEAR COZ,—Here am I, at eight in the morning, in full dress, going a visiting to Chicheley. We are a strong party, and fill two chaises; Mrs F. the elder, and Mrs G. in one; Mrs F. the younger, and myself in another. Were it not that I shall find Chesters at the end of my journey, I should be inconsolable. That expectation alone supports my spirits; and even with this prospect before me, when I saw this moment a poor old woman coming up the lane opposite my window, I could not help sighing, and saying to myself,—"Poor, but happy old woman! thou art exempted by thy situation in life, from riding in chaises, and making thyself fine in a morning, happier therefore in my account than I,

* For the solution, see Letter 339.

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who am under the cruel necessity of doing both. Neither dost thou write verses, neither hast thou ever heard of the name of Homer, whom I am miserable to abandon for a whole morning!" This, and more of the same sort, passed in my mind, on seeing the old woman above said.

The troublesome business, with which I filled my last letter, is (I hope) by this time concluded, and Mr Archdeacon satisfied. I can, to be sure, but ill afford to pay fifty pounds for another man's negligence, but would be happy to pay an hundred rather than be treated as if I were insolvent,—threatened with attorneys and bums. One would think that, living where I live, I might be exempted from trouble; but, alas! as the philosophers often affirm, there is no nook under heaven in which trouble cannot enter; and perhaps had there never been one philosopher in the world, this is a truth that would not have been always altogether a secret.

I have made two inscriptions lately, at the request of Thomas Gifford, Esq. who is sowing twenty acres with acorns on one side of his house, and twenty acres with ditto on the other. He erects two memorials of stone on the occasion, that when posterity shall be curious to know the age of the oaks, their curiosity may be gratified.

Other stones the era tell,
When some feeble mortal fell;
I stand here to date the birth
Of these hardy sons of earth.
Anno 1790.

Reader! behold a monument
That asks no sigh or tear,
Though it perpetuate the event
Of a great burial here.
Anno 1791.

My works therefore will not all perish, or will not all perish soon, for he has ordered his lapidary to cut the characters very deep, and in stone extremely hard. It is not in vain then, that I have so long exercised the business of a poet. I shall at least reap the reward of my labours, and be immortal probably for many years.*—Ever thine, W. C.

* Cowper is not the only poet who has felt in this manner. Sir Walter Scott, who was extremely fond of talking about the trees he had planted, used to say he expected to be remembered a hundred years afterwards, on account of them.—S.

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332.—TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

POEMS OF HOMER WRITTEN ON THE SKINS OF SERPENTS — BISHOP BAGOT.

WESTON, *June* 22, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

* * * *

* * * * *

Villoison makes no mention of the serpent, whose skin, or bowels, or perhaps both, were honoured with the Iliad and Odyssey inscribed upon them. But I have conversed with a living eye-witness of an African serpent, long enough to have afforded skin and guts for the purpose. In Africa, there are ants also, which frequently destroy these monsters. They are not much larger than ours, but they travel in a column of immense length, and eat through every thing that opposes them. Their bite is like a spark of fire. When these serpents have killed their prey, lion or tiger, or any other large animal, before they swallow him, they take a considerable circuit round about the carcass, to see if the ants are coming, because when they have gorged their prey, they are unable to escape them. They are nevertheless sometimes surprised by them in their unwieldy state, and the ants make a passage through them. Now, if you thought your own story of Homer, bound in snake skin, worthy of three notes of admiration, you cannot do less than add six to mine, confessing at the same time, that if I put you to the expense of a letter, I do not make you pay your money for nothing. But this account I had from a person of most unimpeached veracity.

I rejoice with you in the good Bishop's removal to St Asaph, and especially because the Norfolk parsons much more resemble the ants above mentioned, than he the serpent. He is neither of vast size, nor unwieldly, nor voracious; neither, I dare say, does he sleep after dinner, according to the practice of the said serpent. But, harmless as he is, I am mistaken if his mutinous clergy did not sometimes disturb his rest, and if he did not find their bite, though they could not actually eat through him, in a degree resembling fire. Good men like him, and peaceable, should have good and peaceable folks to deal with, and I heartily wish him such in his new diocese. But if he will keep the clergy to their

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business, he shall have trouble, let him go where he may; and this is boldly spoken, considering that I speak it to one of that reverend body. But ye are like Jeremiah's basket of figs. Some of you could not be better, and some of you are stark naught. Ask the bishop himself, if this be not true!

W. C.

333. — TO MRS BODHAM.

DIFFICULTY OF RENEWING A CORRESPONDENCE LONG INTERRUPTED — INVITATION TO WESTON.

WESTON, *June* 29, 1790.

MY DEAREST COUSIN, — It is true that I did sometimes complain to Mrs Unwin of your long silence. But it is likewise true, that I made many excuses for you in my own mind, and did not feel myself at all inclined to be angry, nor even much to wonder. There is an awkwardness and a difficulty in writing to those whom distance and length of time have made in a manner new to us, that naturally gives us a check, when we would otherwise be glad to address them. But a time, I hope, is near at hand, when you and I shall be effectually delivered from all such constraints, and correspond as fluently as if our intercourse had suffered much less interruption.

You must not suppose, my dear, that though I may be said to have lived many years with a pen in my hand, I am myself altogether at my ease on this tremendous occasion. Imagine rather, and you will come nearer to the truth, that when I placed this sheet before me, I asked myself more than once, "How shall I fill it? One subject indeed presents itself, the pleasant prospect that opens upon me, of our coming once more together, but that once exhausted, with what shall I proceed?" Thus I questioned myself; but finding neither end nor profit of such questions, I bravely resolved to dismiss them all at once, and to engage in the great enterprise of a letter to my quondam Rose, at a venture. There is great truth in a rant of Nat. Lee's, or of Dryden's, I know not which, who makes an enamoured youth say to his mistress,

> And nonsense shall be eloquence in love.

For certain it is, that they who truly love one another, are not very nice examiners of each other's style or matter: if an epistle comes, it is always welcome, though it be perhaps

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neither so wise nor so witty as one might have wished to make it. And now, my cousin, let me tell thee how much I feel myself obliged to Mr Bodham, for the readiness he expresses to accept my invitation. Assure him that, stranger as he is to me at present, and natural as the dread of strangers has ever been to me, I shall yet receive him with open arms, because he is your husband, and loves you dearly. That consideration alone will endear him to me, and I dare say that I shall not find it his only recommendation to my best affections. May the health of his relation (his mother I suppose) be soon restored, and long continued, and may nothing melancholy, of what kind soever, interfere to prevent our joyful meeting. Between the present moment and September, our house is clear for your reception, and you have nothing to do but to give us a day or two's notice of your coming. In September, we expect Lady Hesketh, and I only regret that our house is not large enough to hold all together, for were it possible that you could meet, you would love each other.

Mrs Unwin bids me offer you her best love. She is never well, but always patient, and always cheerful, and feels before hand that she shall be loth to part with you.

My love to all the dear Donnes of every name!—Write soon, no matter about what. W. C.

334.—TO LADY HESKETH.

MRS UNWIN'S HEALTH — POLITICAL FANATICISM OF THE FRENCH.

July 7, 1790.

INSTEAD of beginning with the saffron-vested morning, to which Homer invites me, on a morning that has no saffron vest to boast, I shall begin with you.

It is irksome to us both to wait so long as we must for you, but we are willing to hope that by a longer stay you will make us amends for all this tedious procrastination.

Mrs Unwin has made known her whole case to Mr Gregson, whose opinion of it has been very consolatory to me: he says indeed it is a case perfectly out of the reach of all physical aid, but at the same time not at all dangerous. Constant pain is a sad grievance, whatever part is affected, and she is hardly ever free from an aching head, as well as an uneasy side; but patience is an anodyne of God's own preparation, and of that he gives her largely.

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The French, who, like all lively folks, are extreme in every thing, are such in their zeal for freedom; and if it were possible to make so noble a cause ridiculous, their manner of promoting it could not fail to do so. Princes and peers reduced to plain gentlemanship, and gentles reduced to a level with their own lackeys, are excesses of which they will repent hereafter. Difference of rank and subordination are, I believe, of God's appointment, and consequently essential to the wellbeing of society: but what we mean by fanaticism in religion is exactly that which animates their politics; and unless time should sober them, they will, after all, be an unhappy people. Perhaps it deserves not much to be wondered at, that at their first escape from tyrannic shackles they should act extravagantly, and treat their kings as they have sometimes treated their idols. To these, however, they are reconciled in due time again, but their respect for monarchy is at an end. They want nothing now but a litttle English sobriety, and that they want extremely: I heartily wish them some wit in their anger, for it were great pity that so many millions should be miserable for want of it.

335.—TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

DANGER OF GIVING TOO MUCH TIME TO MUSIC—INVITATION TO WESTON.

WESTON, *July* 8, 1790.

MY DEAR JOHNNY,—You do well to perfect yourself on the violin. Only beware, that an amusement so very bewitching as music, especially when we produce it ourselves, do not steal from you ALL those hours that should be given to study. I can be well content, that it should serve you as a refreshment after severer exercises, but not that it should engross you wholly. Your own good sense will most probably dictate to you this precaution, and I might have spared you the trouble of it; but I have a degree of zeal for your proficiency in more important pursuits, that would not suffer me to suppress it.

Having delivered my conscience by giving you this sage admonition, I will convince you that I am a censor not over and above severe, by acknowledging in the next place that I have known very good performers on the violin very learned also; and my cousin, Dr Spencer Madan, is an instance.

I am delighted that you have engaged your sister to visit us; for I say to myself, If John be amiable, what must Catharine be? For we males, be we angelic as we may, are always

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surpassed by the ladies. But know this, that I shall not be in love with either of you, if you stay with us only a few days, for you talk of a week or so. Correct this erratum, I beseech you, and convince us by a much longer continuance here, that it was one. W. C.

Mrs Unwin has never been well since you saw her. You are not passionately fond of letter writing, I perceive, who have dropped a lady; but you will be a loser by the bargain; for one letter of hers, in point of real utility and sterling value, is worth twenty of mine, and you will never have another from her, till you have earned it.

336.—TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

RECOMMENDING PUNCTUALITY IN LETTER WRITING—EXPECTED VISIT TO WESTON.

WESTON, *July* 31, 1790.

You have by this time, I presume, answered Lady Hesketh's letter? if not, answer it without delay; and this injunction I give you, judging that it may not be entirely unnecessary; for though I have seen you but once, and only for two or three days, I have found out that you are a scatter-brain. I made the discovery perhaps the sooner, because in this you very much resemble myself, who in the course of my life have, through mere carelessness and inattention, lost many advantages; an insuperable shyness has also deprived me of many. And here again there is a resemblance between us. You will do well to guard against both, for of both, I believe, you have a considerable share as well as myself.

We long to see you again, and are only concerned at the short stay you propose to make with us. If time should seem to you as short at Weston as it seems to us, your visit here will be gone "as a dream when one awaketh, or as a watch in the night."

It is a life of dreams; but the pleasantest one naturally wishes longest.

I shall find employment for you, having made already some part of the fair copy of the Odyssey a foul one. I am revising it for the last time, and spare nothing that I can mend.* The Iliad is finished.

* This revisal was completed on the 25th of August following; five years and one month (exclusive of the period of illness before mentioned) from the writer's entering on the translation of Homer.—JOHNSON.

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If you have Donne's Poems, bring them with you, for I have not seen them many years, and should like to look them over.

You may treat us too, if you please, with a little of your music, for I seldom hear any, and delight much in it. You need not fear a rival, for we have but two fiddles in the neighbourhood, — one a gardener's, the other a tailor's; terrible performers both! W. C.

337. — TO MR JOHNSON, [PRINTER.]

FUSELI'S REMARKS.

September 7, 1790.

IT grieves me that, after all, I am obliged to go into public without the whole advantage of Mr Fuseli's judicious strictures. My only consolation is, that I have not forfeited them by my own impatience. Five years are no small portion of a man's life, especially at the latter end of it; and in those five years, being a man of almost no engagements, I have done more in the way of hard work, than most could have done in twice the number. I beg you to present my compliments to Mr Fuseli, with many and sincere thanks for the services that his own more important occupations would allow him to render me.

338. — TO MRS BODHAM.

PRAISES OF HER NEPHEW — FINISHED MANUSCRIPTS OF HOMER SENT TO THE PRESS, UNDER HIS CARE.

WESTON, *September* 9, 1790.

MY DEAREST COUSIN, — I am truly sorry to be forced after all to resign the hope of seeing you and Mr Bodham at Weston this year; the next may possibly be more propitious, and I heartily wish it may. Poor Catharine's unseasonable indisposition has also cost us a disappointment, which we much regret; and were it not that Johnny has made shift to reach us, we should think ourselves completely unfortunate. But him we have, and him we will hold, as long as we can; so expect not very soon to see him in Norfolk. He is so harmless, cheerful, gentle, and good tempered, and I am so entirely at my ease with him, that I cannot surrender him without a *needs must*, even to those who have a superior claim upon him. He left us yesterday morning, and whither do you think he is

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gone, and on what errand? Gone, as sure as you are alive, to London, and to convey my Homer to the bookseller's. But he will return the day after to-morrow, and I mean to part with him no more, till necessity shall force us asunder. Suspect me not, my cousin, of being such a monster as to have imposed this task myself on your kind nephew, or even to have thought of doing it. It happened that one day, as we chatted by the fireside, I expressed a wish, that I could hear of some trusty body going to London, to whose care I might consign my voluminous labours, the work of five years; for I purpose never to visit that city again myself, and should have been uneasy to have left a charge of so much importance to me, altogether to the care of a stage-coachman. Johnny had no sooner heard my wish, than offering himself to the service, he fulfilled it; and his offer was made in such terms, and accompanied with a countenance and manner expressive of so much alacrity, that unreasonable as I thought it at first to give him so much trouble, I soon found that I should mortify him by a refusal. He is gone therefore with a box full of poetry, of which I think nobody will plunder him. He has only to say what it is, and there is no commodity I think a freebooter would covet less. W. C.

339. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

NUPTIAL CONGRATULATIONS — COWPER'S FEELINGS ON TERMINATING HIS VERSION OF HOMER.

THE LODGE, *September* 13, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your letter was particularly welcome to me, not only because it came after a long silence, but because it brought me good news — news of your marriage, and consequently, I trust, of your happiness. May that happiness be durable as your lives, and may you be the *Felices ter et amplius* of whom Horace sings so sweetly! This is my sincere wish, and, though expressed in prose, shall serve as your epithalamium. You comfort me when you say that your marriage will not deprive us of the sight of you hereafter. If you do not wish that I should regret your union, you must make that assurance good as often as you have opportunity.

After perpetual versification during five years, I find myself at last a vacant man, and reduced to read for my amusement. My Homer is gone to the press, and you will

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imagine that I feel a void in consequence. The proofs, however, will be coming soon, and I shall avail myself, with all my force, of this last opportunity, to make my work as perfect as I wish it. I shall not, therefore, be long time destitute of employment, but shall have sufficient to keep me occupied all the winter, and part of the ensuing spring, for Johnson purposes to publish either in March, April, or May. My very preface is finished; it did not cost me much trouble, being neither long nor learned. I have spoken my mind as freely as decency would permit on the subject of Pope's version, allowing him, at the same time, all the merit to which I think him entitled. I have given my reasons for translating in blank verse, and hold some discourse on the mechanism of it, chiefly with a view to obviate the prejudices of some people against it. I expatiate a little on the manner in which I think Homer ought to be rendered, and in which I have endeavoured to render him myself, and anticipated two or three cavils, to which I foresee that I shall be liable from the ignorant, or uncandid, in order, if possible, to prevent them. These are the chief heads of my preface, and the whole consists of about twelve pages.

It is possible when I come to treat with Johnson about the copy, I may want some person to negotiate for me; and knowing no one so intelligent as yourself in books, or so well qualified to estimate their just value, I shall beg leave to resort to and rely on you as my negotiator. But I will not trouble you unless I should see occasion. My cousin was the bearer of my MSS. to London: he went on purpose, and returns to-morrow. Mrs Unwin's affectionate felicitations, added to my own, conclude me, my dear friend, sincerely yours,

W. C.

The trees of a colonnade will solve my riddle.

340. — TO MR JOHNSON, [PRINTER.]

PREFACE TO THE POEMS — MR JOHNSON'S CORRECTION OF THE PROOF SHEETS.

WESTON, *October* 3, 1790.

MR NEWTON having again requested that the preface which he wrote for my first volume may be prefixed to it, I am desirous to gratify him in a particular that so emphatically bespeaks his friendship for me; and should my books see

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another edition, shall be obliged to you if you will add it accordingly.

I beg that you will not suffer your reverence either for Homer or his translator, to check your continual examinations. I never knew with certainty, till now, that the marginal strictures I found in the Task proofs were yours. The justness of them, and the benefit I derived from them, are fresh in my memory, and I doubt not that their utility will be the same in the present instance.*

WESTON, *October* 30, 1790.

341. — TO MRS BODHAM.

ADVICE TO A YOUTHFUL POET — HIS OWN CHILDHOOD.

WESTON, *November* 21, 1790.

MY DEAR COZ, — Our kindness to your nephew is no more than he must entitle himself to wherever he goes. His amiable disposition and manners will never fail to secure him a warm place in the affection of all who know him. The advice I gave respecting his poem on Audley End was dictated by my love of him, and a sincere desire of his success. It is one thing to write what may please our friends, who, because they are such, are apt to be a little biassed in our favour; and another to write what may please every body: because they who have no connection, or even knowledge of the author, will be sure to find fault if they can. My advice, however salutary and necessary as it seemed to me, was such as I dared not have given to a poet of less diffidence than he. Poets are to a proverb irritable, and he is the only one I ever knew, who seems to have no spark of that fire about him. He has left us about a fortnight, and sorry we were to lose him; but had he been my son, he must have gone, and I could not have regretted him more. If his sister be still with you, present my love to her, and tell her how much I wish to see them at Weston again.

Mrs Hewitt probably remembers more of my childhood, than I can recollect either of hers or my own; but this I recollect, that the days of that period were happy days, compared with most I have seen since. There are few, perhaps, in the world, who have not cause to look back with regret on the days of infancy; yet, to say the truth, I suspect some

* I am anxious to preserve this singular anecdote, as it is honourable both to the modest poet, and to his intelligent bookseller. — HAYLEY.

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deception in this. For infancy itself has its cares; and though we cannot now conceive how trifles could affect us much, it is certain that they did. Trifles they appear now, but such they were not then. W. C.

242. — TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

ON HIS STUDIES — LADY SPENCER.

My Birth-day. Friday, *November* 26, 1790.

My dearest Johnny, — I am happy that you have escaped from the claws of Euclid into the bosom of Justinian. It is useful, I suppose, to *every* man, to be well grounded in the principles of jurisprudence; and I take it to be a branch of science, that bids much fairer to enlarge the mind, and give an accuracy of reasoning, than all the mathematics in the world. Mind your studies, and you will soon be wiser than I can hope to be.

We had a visit on Monday from one of the first women in the world — in point of character I mean, and accomplishments — the Dowager Lady Spencer! I may receive, perhaps, some honours hereafter, should my translation speed according to my wishes, and the pains I have taken with it; but shall never receive any that I shall esteem so highly. She is indeed worthy to whom I should dedicate, and may but my Odyssey prove as worthy of her, I shall have nothing to fear from the critics. — Yours, my dear Johnny, with much affection,

W. C.

343. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

PROFESSIONAL DILIGENCE — COWPER'S HEALTH, AND ENGAGEMENTS WITH THE PROOFS OF HOMER.

The Lodge, *November* 30, 1790.

My dear Friend, — I will confess that I thought your letter somewhat tardy, though at the same time I made every excuse for you, except, as it seems, the right. *That*, indeed, was out of the reach of all possible conjecture. I could not guess that your silence was occasioned by your being occupied with either thieves or thief-takers. Since, however, the cause was such, I rejoice that your labours were not in vain, and that the freebooters, who had plundered your friend, are safe in limbo. I admire, too, as much as I rejoice in your success, the indefatigable spirit that prompted you to pursue, with

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such unremitting perseverance, an object not to be reached but at the expense of infinite trouble, and that must have led you into an acquaintance with scenes and characters the most horrible to a mind like yours. I see in this conduct the zeal and firmness of your friendship to whomsoever professed; and though I wanted not a proof of it myself, contemplate so unequivocal an indication of what you really are, and of what I always believed you to be, with much pleasure. May you rise from the condition of an humble prosecutor, or witness, to the bench of judgment!

When your letter arrived, it found me with the worst and most obstinate cold that I ever caught. This was one reason why it had not a speedier answer. Another is, that except Tuesday morning, there is none in the week in which I am not engaged in the last revisal of my translation,—the revisal I mean of my proof sheets. To this business I give myself with an assiduity and attention truly admirable, and set an example, which, if other poets could be apprised of, they would do well to follow. Miscarriages in authorship, I am persuaded, are as often to be ascribed to want of painstaking, as to want of ability.

Lady Hesketh, Mrs Unwin, and myself, often mention you, and always in terms, that, though you would blush to hear them, you need not be ashamed of; at the same time wishing much that you could change our trio into a quartetto.

W. C.

344.—TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

EXCUSING SILENCE—DELAYS OF PRINTERS — THE LAUREATSHIP.

WESTON, *December* 1, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — It is plain that you understand trap, as we used to say at school: for you begin with accusing me of long silence, conscious yourself at the same time that you have been half a-year in my debt, or thereabout. But I will answer your accusations with a boast, with a boast of having intended many a day to write to you again, notwithstanding your long insolvency. Your brother and sister of Chicheley can both witness for me that, weeks since, I testified such an intention; and if I did not execute it, it was not for want of good-will, but for want of leisure. When will you be able to glory of such designs, so liberal and magnificent — you, who have nothing to do, by your own confession, but to grow fat and saucy? Add to all this, that I have a violent cold, such

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as I never have but at the first approach of winter, and such as at that time I seldom escape. A fever accompanied it, and an incessant cough.

You measure the speed of printers, of my printer at least, rather by your own wishes than by any just standard. Mine, I believe, is as nimble a one as falls to the share of poets in general, though not nimble enough to satisfy either the author or his friends. I told you that my work would go to press in autumn, and so it did. But it had been six weeks in London ere the press began to work upon it. About a month since we began to print, and at the rate of nine sheets in a fortnight have proceeded to about the middle of the sixth Iliad. "No farther?" you say. I answer — No, nor even so far, without much scolding on my part both at the bookseller and the printer. But courage, my friend! Fair and softly as we proceed, we shall find our way through at last; and in confirmation of this hope, while I write this, another sheet arrives. I expect to publish in the spring.

I love and thank you for the ardent desire you express to hear me bruited abroad, *et per ora virûm volitantem.* For your encouragement I will tell you that I read, myself at least, with wonderful complacence what I have done; and if the world, when it shall appear, do not like it as well as I, we will both say and swear with Fluellin, that it is an ass, and a fool, look you! and a prating coxcomb.

I felt no ambition of the laurel. Else, though vainly perhaps, I had friends who would have made a stir on my behalf on that occasion. I confess that when I learned the new condition of the office, that odes were no longer required, and that the salary was increased, I felt not the same dislike of it. But I could neither go to court, nor could I kiss hands, were it for a much more valuable consideration. Therefore never expect to hear that royal favours find out me!

Adieu, my dear old friend! I will send you a mortuary copy soon, and in the meantime remain, ever yours, W. C.

345. — TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

CAMBRIDGE SUBSCRIPTION — PROGRESS OF HOMER.

WESTON, *December* 18, 1790.

I PERCEIVE myself so flattered by the instances of illustrious success mentioned in your letter, that I feel all the amiable modesty, for which I was once so famous, sensibly giving way to a spirit of vainglory.

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The King's College subscription makes me proud — the effect that my verses have had on your two young friends the mathematicians, makes me proud; and I am, if possible, prouder still of the contents of the letter that you enclosed.

You complained of being stupid, and sent me one of the cleverest letters: I have not complained of being stupid, and have sent you one of the dullest. But it is no matter; I never aim at any thing above the pitch of every day's scribble, when I write to those I love.

Homer proceeds, my boy! We shall get through it in time, and, I hope, by the time appointed. We are now in the tenth Iliad. I expect the ladies every minute to breakfast. You have their best love. Mine attends the whole army of Donnes at Mattishall Green assembled. How happy should I find myself, were I but one of the party! My capering days are over. But do you caper for me, that you may give them some idea of the happiness I should feel, were I in the midst of them!

W. C.

346. — TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

COWPER'S FEARS OF THE MONTH OF JANUARY — QUANTITY OF SYLLABLES IN ENGLISH VERSE.

WESTON, *January* 4, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — You would long since have received an answer to your last, had not the wicked clerk of Northampton delayed to send me the printed copy of my annual dirge, which I waited to enclose. Here it is at last, and much good may it do the readers! *

I have regretted that I could not write sooner, especially because it well became me to reply as soon as possible to your kind inquiries after my health, which has been both better and worse since I wrote last. The cough was cured, or nearly so, when I received your letter, but I have lately been afflicted with a nervous fever, a malady formidable to me above all others, on account of the terror and dejection of spirits that in my case always accompany it. I even looked forward, for this reason, to the month now current, with the most miserable apprehensions, for in this month the distemper has twice seized me. I wish to be thankful, however, to the sovereign Dispenser both of health and sickness, that though I have felt cause enough to tremble, he gives me now encouragement to hope that I may dismiss my fears, and expect for this January at least, to escape it.

* See Poems.

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* * The mention of quantity reminds me of a remark that I have seen somewhere, possibly in Johnson, to this purport, that the syllables in our language being neither long nor short, our verse accordingly is less beautiful than the verse of the Greeks or Romans, because requiring less artifice in its construction. But I deny the fact, and am ready to depose on oath, that I find every syllable as distinguishably and clearly either long or short, in our language, as in any other. I know also that without an attention to the quantity of our syllables good verse cannot possibly be written; and that ignorance of this matter is one reason why we see so much that is good for nothing. The movement of a verse is always either shuffling or graceful, according to our management in this particular, and Milton gives almost as many proofs of it in his Paradise Lost as there are lines in the poem. Away, therefore, with all such unfounded observations! I would not give a farthing for many bushels of them, nor you, perhaps, for this letter. Yet upon recollection, forasmuch as I know you to be a dear lover of literary gossip, I think it possible you may esteem it highly.

Believe me, my dear friend, most truly yours, W. C.

347.—TO MR JOHNSON,* [PRINTER.]

ON A LINE IN ONE OF HIS POEMS BEING ALTERED.

Note by the Rev. Mr Johnson.

This extract is, in fact, entitled to a much earlier place in the collection; but having a common subject with the concluding paragraph of the preceding Letter, it seemed to call for insertion immediately after it.

I DID not write the line that has been tampered with, hastily, or without due attention to the construction of it; and what appeared to me its only merit is, in its present state, entirely annihilated.

I know that the ears of modern verse writers are delicate to an excess, and their readers are troubled with the same squeamishness as themselves. So that if a line do not run as smooth as quicksilver, they are offended. A critic of the

* It happened that some accidental reviser of the manuscript had taken the liberty to alter a line in a poem of Cowper's. This liberty drew from the offended poet the following very just and animated remonstrance, which I am anxious to preserve, because it elucidates, with great felicity of expression, his deliberate ideas on English versification.—HAYLEY.

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present day serves a poem as a cook serves a dead turkey, when she fastens the legs of it to a post, and draws out all the sinews. For this we may thank Pope; but unless we could imitate him in the closeness and compactness of his expression, as well as in the smoothness of his numbers, we had better drop the imitation, which serves no other purpose than to emasculate and weaken all we write. Give me a manly rough line, with a deal of meaning in it, rather than a whole poem full of musical periods, that have nothing but their oily smoothness to recommend them!

I have said thus much, as I hinted in the beginning, because I have just finished a much longer poem than the last, which our common friend will receive by the same messenger that has the charge of this letter. In that poem there are many lines, which an ear, so nice as the gentleman's who made the above-mentioned alteration, would undoubtedly condemn; and yet (if I may be permitted to say it) they cannot be made smoother without being the worse for it. There is a roughness on a plum, which nobody, that understands fruit, would rub off, though the plum would be much more polished without it. But lest I tire you, I will only add, that I wish you to guard me from all such meddling; assuring you, that I always write as smoothly as I can; but that I never did, never will, sacrifice the spirit or sense of a passage to the sound of it.

343.—TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

PROPOSED VISIT — SINGULARITIES OF MANNER.

WESTON, *January* 21, 1791.

I KNOW that you have already been catechized by Lady Hesketh on the subject of your return hither before the winter shall be over, and shall therefore only say, that if you CAN COME, we shall be happy to receive you. Remember also, that nothing can excuse the nonperformance of a promise, but absolute necessity! In the meantime, my faith in your veracity is such, that I am persuaded you will suffer nothing less than necessity to prevent it. Were you not extremely pleasant to us, and just the sort of youth that suits us, we should neither of us have said half so much, or perhaps a word on the subject.

Yours, my dear Johnny, are vagaries that I shall never see practised by any other; and whether you slap your ankle, or reel as if you were fuddled, or dance in the path before me, all is characteristic of yourself, and therefore to me delightful

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I have hinted to you indeed sometimes, that you should be cautious of indulging antic habits and singularities of all sorts, and young men in general have need enough of such admonition. But yours are a sort of fairy habits, such as might belong to Puck or Robin Goodfellow, and therefore, good as the advice is, I should be half sorry should you take it.

This allowance at least I give you. Continue to take your walks, if walks they may be called, exactly in their present fashion, till you have taken orders! Then indeed, forasmuch as a skipping, curvetting, bounding Divine, might be a spectacle not altogether seemly, I shall consent to your adoption of a more grave demeanour. W. C.

349. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

SUBSCRIPTIONS FROM THE SCOTTISH UNIVERSITIES TO HOMER—PRESENT OF POPE'S TRANSLATION.

THE LODGE, *February* 5, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — My letters to you are all either petitionary, or in the style of acknowledgments and thanks, and such nearly in an alternate order. In my last, I loaded you with commissions, for the due discharge of which I am now to say, and say truly, how much I feel myself obliged to you; neither can I stop there, but must thank you likewise for new honours from Scotland, which have left me nothing to wish for from that country; for my list is now, I believe, graced with the subscription of all its learned bodies. I regret only that some of them arrived too late to do honour to my present publication of names. But there are those among them, and from Scotland too, that may give an useful hint perhaps to our own universities. Your very handsome present of Pope's Homer has arrived safe, notwithstanding an accident that befell him by the way. The Hall servant brought the parcel from Olney, resting it on the pommel of the saddle, and his horse fell with him. Pope was in consequence rolled in the dirt, but being well coated got no damage. If augurs and soothsayers were not out of fashion, I should have consulted one or two of that order, in hope of learning from them that this fall was ominous. I have found a place for him in the parlour, where he makes a splendid appearance, and where he shall not long want a neighbour, one who, if less popular than himself, shall at least look as big as he. How has it happened that, since Pope did certainly dedicate both Iliad and Odyssey, no dedication is found in this first edition of them? W. C.

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350. — TO LADY HESKETH.

POETIC FAME.

February 13, 1791.

I CAN now send you a full and true account of this business. Having learned that your inn at Woburn was the George, we sent Samuel thither yesterday. Mr Martin, master of the George, told him† * * * * * *

W. C.

P. S. I cannot help adding a circumstance that will divert you. Martin, having learned from Sam whose servant he was, told him that he had never seen Mr Cowper, but he had heard him frequently spoken of by the companies that had called at his house; and therefore, when Sam would have paid for his breakfast, would take nothing from him. Who says that fame is only empty breath? On the contrary, it is good ale, and cold beef into the bargain.

351. — TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

BLANK VERSE AND RHYME.

WESTON-UNDERWOOD, *February* 26, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It is a maxim of much weight,
Worth conning o'er and o'er;
He, who has Homer to translate,
Had need do nothing more.

But notwithstanding the truth and importance of this apophthegm, to which I lay claim as the original author of it, it is not equally true that my application to Homer, close as it is, has been the sole cause of my delay to answer you. No. In observing so long a silence I have been influenced much more by a vindictive purpose, a purpose to punish you

† This letter contained the history of a servant's cruelty to a post horse, which a reader of humanity could not wish to see in print. But the postscript describes so pleasantly the signal influence of a poet's reputation on the spirit of a liberal innkeeper, that it surely ought not to be suppressed. — HAYLEY.

The "influence of a poet's reputation on the spirit of a liberal innkeeper" is not confined to this single instance. Shortly after the announcement of the authorship of Waverley, Sir Walter Scott and part of his family were travelling to London. On their way they stopped over night at an inn at ———. When Sir Walter on the following morning asked for his bill, the landlord said that he considered himself amply paid by having had the honour to entertain the Author of Waverley; and begged that in any future journey Sir Walter would use his inn as his own house.—S.

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for your suspicion that I could possibly feel myself hurt or offended by any critical suggestion of yours that seemed to reflect on the purity of my nonsense verses. Understand, if you please, for the future, that whether I disport myself in Greek or Latin, or in whatsoever other language, you are hereby, henceforth, and for ever, entitled and warranted to take any liberties with it, to which you shall feel yourself inclined, not excepting even the lines themselves which stand at the head of this letter!

You delight me when you call *blank* verse the English *heroic;* for I have always thought, and often said, that we have no other verse worthy to be so entitled. When you read my Preface you will be made acquainted with my sentiments on this subject pretty much at large; for which reason I will curb my zeal, and say the less about it at present. That Johnson, who wrote harmoniously in rhyme, should have had so defective an ear as never to have discovered any music at all in blank verse, till he heard a particular friend of his reading it, is a wonder never sufficiently to be wondered at. Yet this is true on his own acknowledgment, and amounts to a plain confession (of which perhaps he was not aware when he made it) that he did not know how to read blank verse himself. In short, he either suffered prejudice to lead him in a string whithersoever it would, or his taste in poetry was worth little. I don't believe he ever read any thing of that kind with enthusiasm in his life: and as good poetry cannot be composed without a considerable share of that quality in the mind of the author, so neither can it be read or tasted as it ought to be without it.

I have said all this in the morning fasting, but am soon going to my tea. When therefore I shall have told you that we are now, in the course of our printing, in the second book of the Odyssey, I shall only have time to add, that I am, my dear friend, most truly yours, W. C.

I think your Latin quotations very applicable to the present state of France. But France is in a situation new and untried before.

352. — TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

UNIVERSITY SUBSCRIPTIONS.

February 27, 1791.

Now, my dearest Johnny, I must tell thee in few words how much I love and am obliged to thee for thy affectionate services.

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My Cambridge honours are all to be ascribed to you, and to you only. Yet you are but a little man; and a little man into the bargain who have kicked the mathematics, their idol, out of your study. So important are the endings which Providence frequently connects with small beginnings. Had you been here, I could have furnished you with much employment; for I have so dealt with your fair manuscripts in the course of my polishing and improving, that I have almost blotted out the whole. Such, however, as it is, I must now send it to the printer, and he must be content with it, for there is not time to make a fresh copy. We are now printing the second book of the Odyssey.

Should the Oxonians bestow none of their notice on me on this occasion, it will happen singularly enough, that as Pope received all his university honours in the subscription way from Oxford, and none at all from Cambridge, so I shall have received all mine from Cambridge, and none from Oxford.* This is the more likely to be the case, because I understand that on whatsoever occasion either of those learned bodies thinks fit to move, the other always makes it a point to sit still, thus proving its superiority.

I shall send up your letter to Lady Hesketh in a day or two, knowing that the intelligence contained in it will afford her the greatest pleasure. Know likewise, for your own gratification, that all the Scotch universities have subscribed, none excepted.

We are all as well as usual; that is to say, as well as reasonable folks expect to be on the crazy side of this frail existence.

I rejoice that we shall so soon have you again at our fireside. W. C.

353.—TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

PROGRESS OF PRINTING HOMER.

WESTON, *March* 6, 1791.

AFTER all this ploughing and sowing on the plains of Troy, once fruitful, such at least to my translating predecessor, some harvest I hope will arise for me also. My long work has received its last last touches, and I am now giving

* It happened as here anticipated,—Oxford did not subscribe for a single copy of Cowper's Homer. Rivals in patronage!

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my preface its final adjustment. We are in the fourth Odyssey in the course of our printing, and I expect that I and the swallows shall appear together. They have slept all the winter, but I, on the contrary, have been extremely busy. Yet if I can *virum volitare per ora* as swiftly as they through the air, I shall account myself well requited.—Adieu!

W. C.

354.—TO THE REV. MR HURDIS.*

REPLY TO A FIRST LETTER—THANKS FOR OFFERS OF ASSISTANCE.

WESTON, *March* 6, 1791.

SIR,—I have always entertained, and have occasionally avowed, a great degree of respect for the abilities of the unknown author of the Village Curate, unknown at that time, but now well known, and not to me only, but to many. For before I was favoured with your obliging letter, I knew your name, your place of abode, your profession, and that you had four sisters,—all which I learned neither from our bookseller, nor from any of his connections: you will perceive, therefore, that you are no longer an author incognito. The writer, indeed, of many passages that have fallen from your pen could not long continue so. Let genius, true genius, conceal itself where it may, we may say of it, as the young man in Terence of his beautiful mistress, "*Diu latere non potest.*"

I am obliged to you for your kind offers of service, and will not say that I shall not be troublesome to you hereafter; but at present I have no need to be so. I have within these two days given the very last stroke of my pen to my long translation, and what will be my next career I know not. At any rate we shall not, I hope, hereafter be known to each other as poets only, for your writings have made me ambitious of a nearer approach to you. Your door, however, will never be opened to me. My fate and fortune have combined with my natural disposition to draw a circle round me which I cannot pass; nor have I been more than thirteen miles from home these twenty years, and so far very seldom. But you are a younger man, and therefore, may not be quite so immoveable;

* The Rev. James Hurdis was at this time Rector of Bishopstone, in Sussex, where he was born in 1763. He is author of the works mentioned in the text, "The Favourite Village," with other poems, dissertations, and minor productions. He died in 1801, professor of poetry at Oxford.

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in which case, should you choose at any time to move Weston-ward, you will always find me happy to receive you; and in the meantime I remain, with much respect, your most obedient servant, critic, and friend, W. C.

P.S. I wish to know what you mean to do with Sir Thomas.* For though I expressed doubts about his theatrical possibilities, I think him a very respectable person, and with some improvement well worthy of being introduced to the public.

355. — TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

FRENCH PRINTS OF HOMERIC SUBJECTS.

March 10, 1791.

GIVE my affectionate remembrances to your sisters, and tell them I am impatient to entertain them with my old story new dressed.

I have two French prints hanging in my study, both on Iliad subjects; and I have an English one in the parlour, on a subject from the same poem. In one of the former, Agamemnon addresses Achilles exactly in the attitude of a dancing-master turning miss in a minuet: in the latter the figures are plain, and the attitudes plain also. This is, in some considerable measure, I believe, the difference between my translation and Pope's; and will serve as an exemplification of what I am going to lay before you and the public.

W. C.

356. — TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

DR JOHNSON'S TASTE IN POETRY — DOMESTIC INCIDENTS.

WESTON, *March* 18, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I give you joy that you are about to receive some more of my elegant prose, and I feel myself in danger of attempting to make it even more elegant than usual, and thereby of spoiling it, under the influence of your commendations. But my old helter-skelter manner has already succeeded so well, that I will not, even for the sake of entitling myself to a still greater portion of your praise, abandon it.

* Sir Thomas More, a tragedy.

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I did not call in question Johnson's true spirit of poetry, because he was not qualified to relish blank verse, (though, to tell you the truth, I think that but an ugly symptom;) but if I did not express it, I meant, however, to infer it from the perverse judgment that he has formed of our poets in general, —depreciating some of the best, and making honourable mention of others, in my opinion, not undeservedly neglected. I will lay you sixpence, that, had he lived in the days of Milton, and by any accident had met with his Paradise Lost, he would neither have directed the attention of others to it, nor have much admired it himself. Good sense, in short, and strength of intellect, seem to me, rather than a fine taste, to have been his distinguishing characteristics. But should you still think otherwise, you have my free permission; for so long as you have yourself a taste for the beauties of Cowper, I care not a fig whether Johnson had a taste or not.

I wonder where you find all your quotations, pat as they are to the present condition of France. Do you make them yourself, or do you actually find them? I am apt to suspect sometimes, that you impose them only on a poor man who has but twenty books in the world, and two of them are your brother Chester's. They are, however, much to the purpose, be the author of them who he may.

I was very sorry to learn lately that my friend at Chicheley has been some time indisposed, either with gout or rheumatism, (for it seems to be uncertain which) and attended by Dr Kerr. I am at a loss to conceive how so temperate a man should acquire the gout, and am resolved, therefore, to conclude that it must be the rheumatism, which, bad as it is, is in my judgment the best of the two; and will afford me besides some opportunity to sympathize with him, for I am not perfectly exempt from it myself. Distant as you are in situation, you are yet, perhaps, nearer to him in point of intelligence than I; and if you can send me any particular news of him, pray do it in your next.

I love and thank you for your benediction. If God forgive me my sins, surely I shall love him much, for I have much to be forgiven. But the quantum need not discourage me, since there is one whose atonement can suffice for all.

Τοῦ δὶ καθ' αἷμα ῥίζαν, καὶ σοὶ, καὶ ἐμοὶ, καὶ ἀδελφοῖς
Ἡμισίοις, αὐτοῦ σωζομένοις θανάτῳ.

Accept our joint remembrances, and believe me affectionately yours, W. C.

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357. — TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

PRODUCTIONS OF THE NORWICH POETESS — NATURAL GENIUS.

WESTON, *March* 19, 1791.

MY DEAREST JOHNNY, — You ask if it may not be improper to solicit Lady Hesketh's subscription to the poems of the Norwich maiden? To which I reply, it will be by no means improper. On the contrary, I am persuaded that she will give her name with a very good will, for she is much an admirer of poesy that is worthy to be admired; and such, I think, judging by the specimen, the poesy of this maiden, Elizabeth Bentley, of Norwich, is likely to prove.

Not that I am myself inclined to expect in general great matters, in the poetical way, from persons whose ill fortune it has been to want the common advantages of education; neither do I account it in general a kindness to such, to encourage them in the indulgence of a propensity more likely to do them harm in the end, than to advance their interest. Many such phenomena have arisen within my remembrance, at which all the world has wondered for a season, and has then forgot them.

The fact is, that though strong natural genius is always accompanied with strong natural tendency to its object, yet it often happens that the tendency is found where the genius is wanting. In the present instance, however, (the poems of a certain Mrs Leapor excepted, who published some forty years ago,) I discern, I think, more marks of a true poetical talent than I remember to have observed in the verses of any other, male or female, so disadvantageously circumstanced. I wish her, therefore, good speed, and subscribe to her with all my heart.

You will rejoice when I tell you, that I have some hopes, after all, of a harvest from Oxford also: Mr Throckmorton has written to a person of considerable influence there, which he has desired him to exert in my favour; and *his* request, I should imagine, will hardly prove a vain one.—Adieu.

W. C.

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358. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

SUBSCRIPTION FOR HOMER IN SCOTLAND.

WESTON, *March* 24, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — You apologize for your silence in a manner which affords me so much pleasure, that I cannot but be satisfied. Let business be the cause, and I am contented. That is a cause to which I would even be accessary myself, and would increase yours by any means, except by a lawsuit of my own, at the expense of all your opportunities of writing oftener than thrice in a twelvemonth.

Your application to Dr Dunbar reminds me of two lines to be found somewhere in Dr Young:

> And now a poet's gratitude you see;
> Grant him two favours, and he 'll ask for three.

In this particular, therefore, I perceive that a poet, and a poet's friend, bear a striking resemblance to each other. The Doctor will bless himself that the number of Scotch universities is not larger, assured that if they equalled those in England, in number of colleges, you would give him no rest till he had engaged them all. It is true, as Lady Hesketh told you, that I shall not fear, in the matter of subscriptions, a comparison even with Pope himself; considering, I mean, that we live in days of terrible taxation; and when verse, not being a necessary of life, is accounted dear, be it what it may, even at the lowest price. I am no very good arithmetician, yet I calculated the other day, in my morning walk, that my two volumes, at the price of three guineas, will cost the purchaser less than the seventh part of a farthing per line. Yet there are lines among them that have cost me the labour of hours, and none that have not cost me some labour. W. C.

359. — TO LADY HESKETH.

HORACE WALPOLE — ADVANTAGE OF VIGOROUS COMPOSITION ON RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS.

Friday night, March 25, 1791.

MY DEAREST COZ, — Johnson writes me word, that he has repeatedly called on Horace Walpole, and has never found him at home. He has also written to him, and received no

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answer. I charge thee, therefore, on thy allegiance, that thou move not a finger more in this business. My back is up, and I cannot bear the thought of wooing him any farther, nor would do it, though he were as *pig* a gentleman (look you!) as Lucifer himself. I have Welsh blood in me, if the pedigree of the Donnes say true, and every drop of it says,—"Let him alone!"

I should have dined at the Hall to-day, having engaged myself to do so; but an untoward occurrence, that happened last night, or rather this morning, prevented me. It was a thundering rap at the door, just after the clock struck three. First, I thought the house was on fire. Then I thought the Hall was on fire. Then I thought it was a house-breaker's trick. Then I thought it was an express. In any case I thought that if it should be repeated, it would awaken and terrify Mrs Unwin, and kill her with spasms. The consequence of all these thoughts was the worst nervous fever I ever had in my life, although it was the shortest. The rap was given but once, though a multifarious one. Had I heard a second, I should have risen myself at all adventures. It was the only minute since you went, in which I have been glad that you were not here. Soon after I came down, I learned that a drunken party had passed through the village at that time, and they were no doubt the authors of this witty, but troublesome invention.

Our thanks are due to you for the book you sent us. Mrs Unwin has read to me several parts of it, which I have much admired. The observations are shrewd and pointed; and there is much wit in the similes and illustrations. Yet a remark struck me, which I could not help making *vivâ voce* on the occasion. If the book has any real value, and does in truth deserve the notice taken of it by those to whom it is addressed, its claim is founded neither on the expression, nor on the style, nor on the wit of it, but altogether on the truth that it contains. Now the same truths are delivered, to my knowledge, perpetually from the pulpit by ministers, whom the admirers of this writer would disdain to hear. Yet the truth is not the less important for not being accompanied and recommended by brilliant thoughts and expressions; neither is God, from whom comes all truth, any more a respecter or wit than he is of persons. It will appear soon whether they applaud the book for the sake of its unanswerable arguments, or only tolerate the argument for the sake of the splendid manner in which it is enforced. I wish as heartily that it

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may do them good, as if I were myself the author of it. But, alas! my wishes and hopes are much at variance. It will be the talk of the day, as another publication of the same kind has been; and then the noise of Vanity Fair will drown the voice of the preacher.

I am glad to learn that the Chancellor does not forget me, though more for his sake than my own; for I see not how he can ever serve a man like me. Adieu, my dearest Coz.

W. C.

360. — TO MRS THROCKMORTON.

UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT TO CREATE AN INTEREST FOR HOMER AT OXFORD — ON A PAMPHLET BY HER HUSBAND.

April 1, 1791.

My dear Mrs Frog, — A word or two before breakfast, which is all that I shall have time to send you. You have not, I hope, forgot to tell Mr Frog, how much I am obliged to him for his kind, though unsuccessful, attempt in my favour at Oxford. It seems not a little extraordinary, that persons so nobly patronized themselves, on the score of literature, should resolve to give no encouragement to it in return. Should I find a fair opportunity to thank them hereafter, I will not neglect it.

> Could Homer come himself, distress'd and poor,
> And tune his harp at Rhedicina's door,
> The rich old vixen would exclaim, I fear,
> "Begone! no tramper gets a farthing here."

I have read your husband's pamphlet through and through. You may think, perhaps, and so may he, that a question so remote from all concern of mine could not interest me; but if you think so, you are both mistaken. He can write nothing that will not interest me: in the first place, for the writer's sake; and, in the next place, because he writes better and reasons better than any body, with more candour, and with more sufficiency, and, consequently, with more satisfaction to all his readers, save only his opponents. They, I think, by this time wish that they had let him alone.

Tom is delighted past measure with his wooden nag, and gallops at a rate that would kill any horse that had a life to lose. Adieu!

W. C.

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361.—TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

CAMBRIDGE SUBSCRIPTIONS.

WESTON, *April* 6, 1791.

MY DEAR JOHNNY,—A thousand thanks for your splendid assemblage of Cambridge luminaries! If you are not contented with your collection, it can only be because you are unreasonable; for I, who may be supposed more covetous on this occasion than any body, am highly satisfied, and even delighted with it. If indeed you should find it practible to add still to the number, I have not the least objection. But this charge I give you,

Αλλο δε τοι ερεω, συ δ' ενι φρεσι βαλλεο σησι.

Stay not an hour beyond the time you have mentioned, even though you should be able to add a thousand names by doing so! For I cannot afford to purchase them at that cost. I long to see you, and so do we both, and will not suffer you to postpone your visit for any such consideration. No, my dear boy! In the affair of subscriptions we are already illustrious enough, shall be so at least, when you shall have inlisted a college or two more; which, perhaps, you may be able to do in the course of the ensuing week. I feel myself much obliged to your university, and much disposed to admire the liberality of spirit they have shewn on this occasion. Certainly I had not deserved much favour of their hands, all things considered. But the cause of literature seems to have some weight with them, and to have superseded the resentment they might be supposed to entertain on the score of certain censures that you wot of. It is not so at Oxford. W. C.

362.—TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

REFUSAL OF OXFORD TO SUBSCRIBE—HIS SUBSCRIBERS EQUAL TO POPE'S.

April 29, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I forget if I told you that Mr Throckmorton had applied through the medium of———to the university of Oxford. He did so, but without success. Their answer has, "that they subscribe to nothing."

Pope's subscriptions did not amount, I think, to six hundred; and mine will not fall very short of five. Noble doings, at a

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time of day whem Homer has no news to tell us, and when all other comforts of life having arisen in price, poetry has of course fallen. I call it a "comfort of life:" it is so to others, but to myself, it is become even a necessary.

These holiday times are very unfavourable to the printer's progress. He and all his demons are making themselves merry, and me sad, for I mourn at every hinderance.

W. C.

363. — TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

PROGRESS OF HOMER—MILTON'S LATIN POEMS.

WESTON, *May* 2, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — Monday being a day in which Homer has now no demands upon me, I shall give part of the present Monday to you. But it this moment occurs to me, that the proposition with which I begin will be obscure to you, unless followed by an explanation. You are to understand, therefore, that Monday being no post-day, I have consequently no proof-sheets to correct, the correction of which is nearly all that I have to do with Homer at present,—I say nearly all, because I am likewise occasionally employed in reading over the whole of what is already printed, that I may make a table of errata to each of the poems. How much is already printed? say you—I answer—the whole Iliad, and almost seventeen books of the Odyssey.

About a fortnight since, perhaps three weeks, I had a visit from your nephew, Mr Bagot, and his tutor, Mr Hurlock, who came hither under conduct of your niece, Miss Barbara. So were the friends of Ulysses conducted to the palace of Antiphates, the Læstrigonian, by that monarch's daughter. But mine is no palace, neither am I a giant, neither did I devour any one of the party — on the contrary, I gave them chocolate, and permitted them to depart in peace. I was much pleased both with the young man and his tutor. In the countenance of the former I saw much Bagotism, and not less in his manners. I will leave you to guess what I mean by that expression. Physiognomy is a study of which I have almost as high an opinion as Lavater himself, the professor of it, and for this good reason, because it never yet deceived me. But perhaps I shall speak more truly if I say that I am somewhat of an adept in the art, although I have *never studied* it; for whether I will or not, I judge of every human creature by the countenance,

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and, as I say, have never yet seen reason to repent of my judgment. Sometimes I feel myself powerfully attracted, as I was by your nephew, and sometimes with equal vehemence repulsed; which attraction and repulsion have always been justified in the sequel.

I have lately read, and with more attention than I ever gave to them before, Milton's Latin poems. But these I must make the subject of some future letter, in which it will be ten to one that your friend Samuel Johnson gets another slap or two at the hands of your humble servant. Pray read them yourself, and with as much attention as I did; then read the Doctor's remarks if you have them; and then tell me what you think of both. It will be pretty sport for you on such a day as this, which is the fourth that we have had of almost incessant rain. The weather, and a cold, the effect of it, have confined me ever since last Thursday. Mrs Unwin, however, is well, and joins me in every good wish to yourself and family. I am, my good friend, most truly yours,

W. C.

364.—TO THE REV. MR BUCHANAN.

A PROJECTED POEM.

WESTON, *May* 11, 1791.

MY DEAR SIR,—You have sent me a beautiful poem, wanting nothing but metre. I would to Heaven that you would give it that requisite yourself; for he who could make the sketch, cannot but be well qualified to finish. But if you will not, I will; provided always, nevertheless, that God gives me ability, for it will require no common share to do justice to your conceptions.—I am much yours, W. C.*

Your little messenger vanished before I could catch him.

365.—TO LADY HESKETH.

COWPER'S OPINION OF THE COMPARATIVE MERITS OF HIS FIRST AND SECOND VOLUMES—THEIR SUCCESS IN AMERICA.

THE LODGE, *May* 18, 1791.

MY DEAREST COZ.—Has another of thy letters fallen short of its destination; or wherefore is it, that thou writest not?

* This note alludes to the idea of a poem to be called the "Four Ages," the plan of which Mr Buchanan had sketched to Cowper in a letter.—See Life.

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One letter in five weeks is a poor allowance for your friends at Weston. One, that I received two or three days since from Mrs Frog, has not at all enlightened me on this head. But I wander in a wilderness of vain conjecture.

I have had a letter lately from New York, from a Dr Cogswell of that place, to thank me for my fine verses, and to tell me, which pleased me particularly, that after having read The Task, my first volume fell into his hands, which he read also, and was equally pleased with. This is the only instance I can recollect of a reader who has done justice to my first effusions: for I am sure, that in point of expression they do not fall a jot below my second, and that in point of subject they are for the most part superior. But enough, and too much of this. The Task he tells me has been reprinted in that city.—Adieu! my dearest coz.

We have blooming scenes under wintry skies, and with icy blasts to fan them.—Ever thine, W. C.

366.—TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

HOMER'S POEM OF THE FROGS AND MICE.

WESTON, *May* 23, 1791.

MY DEAREST JOHNNY,—Did I not know that you are never more in your element than when you are exerting yourself in my cause, I should congratulate you on the hope there seems to be that your labour will soon have an end.

You will wonder perhaps, my Johnny, that Mrs Unwin, by my desire, enjoined you to secrecy concerning the translation of the Frogs and Mice. Wonderful it may well seem to you that I should wish to hide for a short time from a few, what I am just going to publish to all. But I had more reasons than one for this mysterious management; that is to say, I had two. In the first place, I wished to surprise my readers agreeably; and secondly, I wished to allow none of my friends an opportunity to object to the measure, who might think it perhaps a measure more bountiful than prudent. But I have had my sufficient reward, though not a pecuniary one. It is a poem of much humour, and accordingly I found the translation of it very amusing. It struck me too, that I must either make it part of the present publication, or never publish it at all; it would have been so terribly out of its place in any other volume.

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I long for the time that shall bring you once more to Weston and all your *et ceteras* with you. Oh! what a month of May has this been! Let never poet, English poet at least, give himself to the praises of May again. W. C.

367. — TO LADY HESKETH.

PUBLICATION OF HOMER DELAYED.

THE LODGE, *May* 27, 1791.

MY DEAREST COZ, — I, who am neither dead, nor sick, nor idle, should have no excuse, were I as tardy in answering, as you in writing. I live indeed where leisure abounds; and you, where leisure is not: a difference that accounts sufficiently both for your silence and my loquacity.

When you told Mrs ———, that my Homer would come forth in May, you told her what you believed, and therefore no falsehood. But you told her at the same time what will not happen, and therefore not a truth. There is a medium between truth and falsehood; and, I believe, the word mistake expresses it exactly. I will therefore say that you were mistaken. If instead of May you had mentioned June, I flatter myself that you would have hit the mark; for in June there is every probability that we shall publish. You will say, "Hang the printer! — for it is his fault!" But stay, my dear, hang him not just now! For to execute him, and find another, will cost us time, and so much, too, that I question if, in that case, we should publish sooner than in August. To say truth, I am not perfectly sure that there will be any necessity to hang him at all! though that is a matter which I desire to leave entirely at your discretion, alleging only in the mean-time, that the man does not appear to me during the last half-year to have been at all in fault. His remittance of sheets in all that time has been punctual, save and except while the Easter holidays lasted, when, I suppose, he found it impossible to keep his devils to their business. I shall, however, receive the last sheet of the Odyssey to-morrow, and have already sent up the Preface, together with all the needful. You see, therefore, that the publication of this famous work cannot be delayed much longer.

As for politics, I reck not, having no room in my head for any thing but the Slave bill. That is lost; and all the rest is a trifle. I have not seen Paine's book, but refused to see it

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when it was offered to me. No man shall convince me that I am improperly governed, while I feel the contrary.—Adieu!

W. C.

368.—TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

CONCLUSION OF HOMER.

WESTON, *June*, 1, 1791.

MY DEAREST JOHNNY,—Now you may rest—Now I can give you joy of the period, of which I gave you hope in my last; the period of all your labours in my service.—But this I can foretell you also, that if you persevere in serving your friends at this rate, your life is likely to be a life of labour.—Yet persevere! your rest will be the sweeter hereafter! In the meantime I wish you, if at any time you should find occasion for him, just such a friend as you have proved to me!

W. C.

369.—TO THE REV. MR HURDIS.

HOMER PUBLISHED AT THE WRONG TIME—CHARACTER OF WOMAN WHERE BEST STUDIED.

WESTON, *June* 18, 1791.

MY DEAR SIR,—I ought to have thanked you for your agreeable and entertaining letter much sooner, but I have many correspondents, who will not be said nay; and have been obliged of late to give my last attentions to Homer: the very last indeed; for yesterday I despatched to town, after revising them carefully, the proof sheets of subscribers' names, among which I took special notice of yours, and am much obliged to you for it. We have contrived, or rather my bookseller and printer have contrived, (for they have never waited a moment for me,) to publish as critically at the wrong time, as if my whole interest and success had depended upon it. March, April, and May, said Johnson to me in a letter that I received from him in February, are the best months for publication. *Therefore* now it is determined that Homer shall come out on the first of July; that is to say, exactly at the moment when, except a few lawyers, not a creature will be left in town, who will ever care one farthing about him. To which of these two friends of mine I am indebted for this management I know not. It does not please; but I would be a philosopher as well as a poet, and

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therefore make no complaint, or grumble at all about it. You, I presume, have had dealings with them both — how did they manage for you? And if as they have for me, how did you behave under it? Some who love me complain that I am too passive; and I should be glad of an opportunity to justify myself by your example. The fact is, should I thunder ever so loud, no efforts of that sort will avail me now; therefore, like a good economist of my bolts, I choose to reserve them for more profitable occasions.

I am glad to find that your amusements have been so similar to mine; for, in this instance too, I seemed to have need of somebody to keep me in countenance, especially in my attention and attachment to animals. All the notice that we lords of the creation vouchsafe to bestow on the creatures, is generally to abuse them; it is well, therefore, that here and there a man should be found a little womanish, or, perhaps, a little childish in this matter, who will make some amends, by kissing, and coaxing, and laying them in one's bosom. You remember the little ewe lamb, mentioned by the prophet Nathan; the prophet perhaps invented the tale for the sake of its application to David's conscience; but it is more probable that God inspired him with it for that purpose. If He did, it amounts to a proof that He does not overlook, but, on the contrary, much notices such little partialities and kindness to His *dumb* creatures, as we, because we articulate, are pleased to call them.

Your sisters are fitter to judge than I, whether assembly rooms are the places, of all others, in which the ladies may be studied to most advantage. I am an old fellow, but I had once my dancing days, as you have now; yet I could never find that I learned half so much of a woman's real character by dancing with her, as by conversing with her at home, where I could observe her behaviour at the table, at the fireside, and in all the trying circumstances of domestic life. We are all good when we are pleased; but she is the good woman, who wants not a fiddle to sweeten her. If I am wrong, the young ladies will set me right; in the meantime, I will not teaze you with graver arguments on the subject, especially as I have a hope that years, and the study of the Scripture, and His Spirit, whose word it is, will, in due time, bring you to my way of thinking. I am not one of those sages, who require that young men should be as old as themselves before they have had time to be so. With my love to your fair sisters, I remain, dear sir, most truly yours, W. C

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370. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

INGRATITUDE — CRANMER.

THE LODGE, *June* 15, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — If it will afford you any comfort that you have a share in my affections, of that comfort you may avail yourself at all times. You have acquired it by means which, unless I should become worthless myself, to an uncommon degree, will always secure you from the loss of it. You are learning what all learn, though few at so early an age, that man is an ungrateful animal; and that benefits too often, instead of securing a due return, operate rather as provocations to ill treatment. This I take to be the *summum malum* of the human heart. Towards God we are all guilty of it more or less; but between man and man, we may thank God for it, there are some exceptions. He leaves this peccant principle to operate in some degree against himself in all, for our humiliation I suppose; and because the pernicious effects of it in reality cannot injure Him, He cannot suffer by them; but He knows that unless He should restrain its influence on the dealings of mankind with each other, the bonds of society would be dissolved, and all charitable intercourse at an end amongst us. It was said of Archbishop Cranmer, "Do him an ill turn, and you make him your *friend* for ever;" of others it may be said, "Do them a good one, and they will be for ever your *enemies*." It is the grace of God only that makes the difference.

The absence of Homer (for we have now shaken hands and parted) is well supplied by three relations of mine from Norfolk. My cousin Johnson, an aunt of his, and his sister. I love them all dearly, and am well contented to resign to them the place in my attentions so lately occupied by the chiefs of Greece and Troy. His aunt and I have spent many a merry day together, when we were some forty years younger; and we make shift to be merry together still. His sister is a sweet young woman, graceful, good natured, and gentle, just what I had imagined her to be before I had seen her. Farewell. W. C.

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371. — TO DR JAMES COGSWELL, NEW YORK.

SUCCESS OF COWPER'S POEMS IN AMERICA — THANKS FOR AMERICAN PUBLICATIONS.

WESTON UNDERWOOD, NEAR OLNEY, BUCKS.
June 15, 1791.

DEAR SIR, — Your letter and obliging present from so great a distance, deserved a speedier acknowledgment, and should not have wanted one so long, had not circumstances so fallen out since I received them as to make it impossible for me to write sooner. It is indeed but within this day or two that I have heard how, by the help of my bookseller, I may transmit an answer to you.

My title page, as it well might, misled you. It speaks me of the Inner Temple, and so I am, but a member of that society only, not as an inhabitant. I live here, almost at the distance of sixty miles from London, which I have not visited these eight-and-twenty years, and probably never shall again. Thus it fell out, that Mr Morewood had sailed again for America before your parcel reached me, nor should I (it is likely) have received it at all, had not a cousin of mine, who lives in the Temple, by good fortune received it first, and opened your letter; finding for whom it was intended, he transmitted to me both that and the parcel. Your testimony of approbation of what I have published, coming from another quarter of the globe, could not be but extremely flattering, as was your obliging notice, that the Task had been reprinted in your city. Both volumes, I hope, have a tendency to discountenance vice, and promote the best interests of mankind. But how far they shall be effectual to these invaluable purposes, depends altogether on His blessing, whose truths I have endeavoured to inculcate. In the meantime I have sufficient proof that readers may be pleased, may approve, and yet lay down the book unedified.

During the last five years I have been occupied with a work of a very different nature, a translation of the Iliad and Odyssey into blank verse, and the work is now ready for publication. I undertook it, partly because Pope's is too lax a version, which has lately occasioned the learned of this country to call aloud for a new one, and partly because I could fall on no better expedient to amuse a mind too much addicted to melancholy.

I send you in return for the volumes with which you

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favoured me three on religious subjects, popular productions that have not been long published, and that may not therefore yet have reached your country, The Christian Officer's Panoply, by a Marine Officer, The Importance of the Manners of the Great, and An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World. The two last are said to be written by a lady, Miss Hannah More, and are universally read by people of that rank to which she addresses them. Your manners I suppose may be more pure than ours, yet it is not unlikely that even among you may be found some to whom her strictures are applicable. I return you my thanks, sir, for the volumes you sent me, two of which I have read with pleasure, Mr Edwards's book,* and the Conquest of Canaan. The rest I have not had time to read, except Dr Dwight's Sermon,† which pleased me almost more than any that I have either seen or heard.

I shall account a correspondence with you an honour, and remain, dear sir, your obliged and obedient servant,

W. C.

372.—TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

VISIT FROM LADY BAGOT—HIS OWN MODESTY.

WESTON, *August* 2, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I was much obliged, and still feel myself much obliged to Lady Bagot, for the visit with which she favoured me. Had it been possible that I could have seen Lord Bagot too, I should have been completely happy. For, as it happened, I was that morning in better spirits than usual; and though I arrived late, and after a long walk, and extremely hot, which is a circumstance very apt to disconcert me, yet I was not disconcerted half so much as I generally am at the sight of a stranger, especially of a stranger lady, and more especially at the sight of a stranger lady of quality. When the servant told me that Lady Bagot was in the parlour, I felt my spirits sink ten degrees; but the moment I

* Jonathan Edwards, a native of Connecticut, was born 1703, and died president of the College of New Jersey, 1757. His principal work, the book referred to in the text, is a most masterly performance on the "Freedom of the Human Will."

† The Sermons of Dr Timothy Dwight are now well known in this country. He was born in the State of Massachusetts, in 1752, and died president of Yale College, which owes its celebrity chiefly to him. Besides his System of Theology in the form of Sermons, and a book of Travels, he is author of two poems of merit, "Greenfield Hill," and the "Conquest of Canaan," here mentioned.

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saw her, at least when I had been a minute in her company, I felt them rise again, and they soon rose even above their former pitch. I know two ladies of fashion now, whose manners have this effect upon me. The lady in question, and the Lady Spencer. I am a shy animal, and want much kindness to make me easy. Such I shall be to my dying day.

Here sit *I*, calling myself *shy*, yet have published by the *by*, two great volumes of po*etry*.

This reminds me of Ranger's observation in the Suspicious Husband, who says to somebody, I forget whom,—"There is a degree of assurance in you modest men, that we impudent fellows can never arrive at!"—Assurance indeed! Have you seen 'em? What do you think they are? Nothing less, I can tell you, than a translation of Homer—of the sublimest poet in the world. That's all. Can I ever have the impudence to call myself shy again.

You live, I think, in the neighbourhood of Birmingham? What must you not have felt on the late alarming occasion! You I suppose could see the fires from your windows. We, who only heard the news of them, have trembled. Never sure was religious zeal more terribly manifested, or more to the prejudice of its own cause.

Adieu, my dear friend. I am, with Mrs Unwin's best compliments, ever yours, W. C.

373.—TO THE REV. MR HURDIS.

METHOD OF STUDY—POPE'S AND COWPER'S VERSIONS OF HOMER.

WESTON, *August* 9, 1791.

MY DEAR SIR,—I never make a correspondent wait for an answer through idleness, or want of proper respect for him; but if I am silent, it is because I am busy, or not well, or because I stay till something occur, that may make my letter at least a little better than mere blank paper. I therefore write speedily in reply to yours, being at present neither much occupied, nor at all indisposed, nor forbidden by a dearth of materials.

I wish always when I have a new piece in hand to be as secret as you, and there was a time when I could be so. Then I lived the life of a solitary, was not visited by a single neighbour, because I had none with whom I could associate; nor ever had an inmate. This was when I dwelt at Olney; but since I have removed to Weston the case is different.

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Here I am visited by all around me, and study in a room exposed to all manner of inroads. It is on the ground floor, the room in which we dine, and in which I am sure to be found by all who seek me. They find me generally at my desk, and with my work, whatever it be, before me, unless perhaps I have conjured it into its hiding place before they have had time to enter. This, however, is not always the case, and consequently, sooner or later, I cannot fail to be detected. Possibly you, who I suppose have a snug study, would find it impracticable to attend to any thing closely in an apartment exposed as mine; but use has made it familiar to me, and so familiar, that neither servants going and coming disconcert me; nor even if a lady, with an oblique glance of her eye, catches two or three lines of my MS. do I feel myself inclined to blush, though naturally the shyest of mankind.

You did well, I believe, to cashier the subject of which you gave me a recital. It certainly wants those *agremens*, which are necessary to the success of any subject in verse. It is a curious story, and so far as the poor young lady was concerned, a very affecting one; but there is a coarseness in the character of the hero, that would have spoiled all. In fact, I find it myself a much easier matter to write, than to get a convenient theme to write on.

I am obliged to you for comparing me as you go both with Pope and with Homer. It is impossible in any other way of management to know whether the Translation be well executed or not, and if well, in what degree. It was in the course of such a process, that I first became dissatisfied with Pope. More than thirty years since, and when I was a young Templar, I accompanied him with his original, line by line, through both poems. A fellow student of mine, a person of fine classic taste, joined himself with me in the labour. We were neither of us, as you may imagine, very diligent in our proper business.

I shall be glad if my Reviewers, whosoever they may be, will be at the pains to read me as you do. I want no praise that I am not entitled to; but of that to which I am entitled, I should be loth to lose a tittle, having worked hard to earn it.

I would heartily second the Bishop of Salisbury in recommending to you a close pursuit of your Hebrew studies, were it not that I wish you to publish what I may understand. Do both, and I shall be satisfied.

Your remarks, if I may but receive them soon enough to serve me in case of a new edition, will be extremely welcome.

W. C.

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374. — TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

UNCERTAINTY IN HIS PURSUITS.

WESTON, *August* 9, 1791.

MY DEAREST JOHNNY, — The little that I have heard about Homer myself has been equally, or more flattering than Dr ———'s intelligence, so that I have good reason to hope that I have not studied the old Grecian, and how to dress him, so long, and so intensely, to no purpose. At present I am idle, both on account of my eyes, and because I know not to what to attach myself in particular. Many different plans and projects are recommended to me. Some call aloud for original verse, others for mere translation, and others for other things. Providence, I hope, will direct me in my choice; for other guide I have none, nor wish for another.

God bless you, my dearest Johnny. W. C.*

375. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

TESTIMONIES IN FAVOUR OF HIS TRANSLATION — MILTON'S POEMS.

THE LODGE, *September* 14, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — Whoever reviews me will in fact have a laborious task of it, in the performance of which he ought to move leisurely, and to exercise much critical discernment. In the meantime my courage is kept up by the arrival of such testimonies in my favour, as give me the greatest pleasure, coming from quarters the most respectable. I have reason, therefore, to hope that our periodical judges will not be very averse to me, and that perhaps they may even favour me. If one man of taste and letters is pleased, another man so qualified can hardly be displeased; and if critics of a different description grumble, they will not, however, materially hurt me.

You, who know how necessary it is to me to be employed, will be glad to hear that I have been called to a new literary engagement, and that I have not refused it. A Milton that is to rival, and if possible to exceed in splendour Boydell's Shakespeare, is in contemplation, and I am in the editor's office. Fuseli is the painter. My business will be to select notes from others, and to write original notes; to translate the Latin and Italian poems, and to give a correct text. I shall have years allowed me to do it in. W. C.

* The translation alluded to in this letter was that of the Latin and Italian poetry of Milton, which Cowper was requested by his bookseller to undertake.—See Life, and next Letter.

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376. — TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

BISHOP BAGOT'S PRAISES OF THE TRANSLATION OF HOMER. — MILTON'S POEMS.

WESTON, *September* 21, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — Of all the testimonies in favour of my Homer that I have received, none has given me so sincere a pleasure as that of Lord Bagot. It is an unmixed pleasure and without a drawback; because I know him to be perfectly, and in all respects, whether erudition or a fine taste be in question, so well qualified to judge me, that I can neither expect nor wish a sentence more valuable than his —

- - - - - - - - - - - - - εἰσόκ' ἐϋσμὴ
Ἐν στήθεσσι μένει, καὶ μοι φίλα γούνατ' ὀρώρει.

I hope by this time you have received your volumes, and are prepared to second the applauses of your brother — else, wo be to you! I wrote to Johnson immediately on the receipt of your last, giving him a strict injunction to despatch them to you without delay. He had sold some time since a hundred of the unsubscribed-for copies.

I have not a history in the world except Baker's Chronicle, and that I borrowed three years ago from Mr Throckmorton. Now the case is this: I am translating Milton's third Elegy — his Elegy on the death of the Bishop of Winchester. He begins it with saying, that while he was sitting alone, dejected, and musing on many melancholy themes, first the idea of the Plague presented itself to his mind, and of the havoc made by it among the great. Then he proceeds thus:

Tum memini clarique ducis, fratrisque verendi
Intempestivis ossa cremata rogis:
Et memini Heroum, quos vidit ad æthera raptos,
Flevit et amissos Belgia tota duces.*

I cannot learn from my only oracle, Baker, who this famous

* Cowper's translation of these lines runs thus, —

I next deplored the famed fraternal pair,
Too soon to ashes turn'd, and empty air!
The heroes next, whom snatch'd into the skies,
All Belgia saw, and follow'd with her sighs.

According to Warton, the fraternal pair in the first couplet were the Duke of Brunswick and Count Mansfelt, the champions of the Queen of Bohemia, during the war of the Palatinate. The two heroes in the second couplet, according to the same authority, were the Earls of Oxford and Southampton, the patrons of Shakespeare; both of whom died at the siege of Breda, 1625. The accuracy of this there is reason to doubt. — See Cowper's and Norton's Milton.

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leader and his reverend brother were. Neither does he at all ascertain for me the event alluded to in the second of these couplets. I am not yet possessed of Warton, who probably explains it, nor can be for a month to come. Consult him for me if you have him, or if you have him not, consult some other. Or you may find the intelligence perhaps in your own budget; no matter how you come by it, only send it to me if you can, and as soon as you can, for I hate to leave unsolved difficulties behind me. In the first year of Charles the First, Milton was seventeen years of age, and then wrote this Elegy. The period, therefore, to which I would refer you, is the two or three last years of James the First.

Ever yours, W. C.

377.—TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

LORD BAGOT'S POEM.

WESTON, *October* 25, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your unexpected and transient visit, like every thing else that is past, has now the appearance of a dream; but it was a pleasant one, and I heartily wish that such dreams could occur more frequently. Your brother Chester repeated his visit yesterday and I never saw him in better spirits. At such times he has, now and then, the very look that he had when he was a boy; and when I see it, I seem to be a boy myself, and entirely forget for a short moment the years that have intervened since I was one. The look that I mean is one that you, I dare say, have observed. Then we are at Westminster again. He left with me that poem of your brother Lord Bagot's, which was mentioned when you were here. It was a treat to me, and I read it to my cousin Lady Hesketh and to Mrs Unwin, to whom it was a treat also. It has great sweetness of numbers, and much elegance of expression, and is just such a poem as I should be happy to have composed myself about a year ago, when I was loudly called upon by a certain nobleman, to celebrate the beauties of his villa. But I had two insurmountable difficulties to contend with. One was, that I had never seen his villa, and the other, that I had no eyes at that time for any thing but Homer. Should I at any time hereafter undertake the task, I shall now at least know how to go about it, which, till I had seen Lord Bagot's poem, I verily did not.

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I was particularly charmed with the parody of those beautiful lines of Milton:

> The song was partial, but the harmony
> (What could it less, when spirits immortal sing?)
> Suspended Hell, and took with ravishment
> The thronging audience.

There's a parenthesis for you! The parenthesis, it seems, is out of fashion, and perhaps the moderns are in the right to proscribe what they cannot attain to. I will answer for it that, had we the art at this day of insinuating a sentiment in this graceful manner, no reader of taste would quarrel with the practice. Lord Bagot shewed his by selecting the passage for his imitation.

I would beat Warton if he were living, for supposing that Milton ever repented of his compliment to the memory of Bishop Andrews.* I neither do, nor can, nor will believe it. Milton's mind could not be narrowed by any thing; and though he quarrelled with Episcopacy, in the Church of England idea of it, I am persuaded that a good bishop, as well as any other good man, of whatsoever rank or order, had always a share of his veneration. Yours, my dear friend, very affectionately, W. C.

378.—TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

DOMESTIC INCIDENTS.

WESTON, *October* 31, 1791.

MY DEAR JOHNNY,—Your kind and affectionate letter well deserves my thanks, and should have had them long ago, had I not been obliged lately to give my attention to a mountain of unanswered letters, which I have just now reduced to a molehill; yours lay at the bottom, and I have at last worked my way down to it.

It gives me great pleasure that you have found a house to

* Warton thus ironically concludes his remarks on Milton's Elegy on the death of Bishop Andrews. "Milton must have looked back with disgust and remorse on the panegyric of this performance, as on one of the sins of his youth, inexperience, and orthodoxy, for he had here celebrated not only a bishop, but a bishop who supported the dignity and constitution of the Church of England." It is to this that Cowper refers; but, notwithstanding his indignation, such must have been Milton's feelings, if his politics, as Cromwell's secretary, and a bitter schismatic, were consistent with his situation and avowed sentiments.

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your minds. May you all three be happier in it than the happiest that ever occupied it before you! But my chief delight of all is to learn that you and Kitty are so completely cured of your long and threatening maladies. I always thought highly of Dr Kerr, but his extraordinary success in your two instances has even inspired me with an affection for him.

My eyes are much better than when I wrote last, though seldom perfectly well many days together. At this season of the year I catch perpetual colds, and shall continue to do so, till I have got the better of that tenderness of habit with which the summer never fails to affect me.

I am glad that you have heard well of my work in your country. Sufficient proofs have reached me from various quarters, that I have not ploughed the field of Troy in vain.

Were you here I would gratify you with an enumeration of particulars; but since you are not, it must content you to be told, that I have every reason to be satisfied.

Mrs Unwin, I think, in her letter to cousin Balls, made mention of my new engagement. I have just entered on it, and therefore can at present say little about it.

It is a very creditable one in itself; and may I but acquit myself of it with sufficiency, it will do me honour. The commentator's part, however, is a new one to me, and one that I little thought to appear in.

Remember your promise, that I shall see you in the spring.

The Hall has been full of company ever since you went, and at present my Catharina* is there singing and playing like an angel.

379.—TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

COMPOUND EPITHETS—MILTON.

November 14, 1791.

My Dear Friend,—I have waited and wished for your opinion with the feelings that belong to the value I have for it, and am very happy to find it so favourable. In my table drawer I treasure up a bundle of suffrages, sent me by those of whose approbation I was most ambitious, and shall presently insert yours among them.

* Mr Johnson's sister.

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I know not why we should quarrel with compound epithets; it is certain at least they are as agreeable to the genius of our language as to that of the Greek, which is sufficiently proved by their being admitted into our common and colloquial dialect. Black-eyed, nut-brown, crook-shanked, hump-backed, are all compound epithets, and, together with a thousand other such, are used continually, even by those who profess a dislike to such combinations in poetry. Why, then, do they treat with so much familiarity a thing that they say disgusts them? I doubt if they could give this question a reasonable answer, unless they should answer it by confessing themselves unreasonable.

I have made a considerable progress in the translation of Milton's Latin poems. I give them, as opportunity offers, all the variety of measure that I can. Some I render in heroic rhyme, some in stanzas, some in seven, and some in eight syllable measure, and some in blank verse. They will, altogether, I hope, make an agreeable miscellany for the English reader. They are certainly good in themselves, and cannot fail to please, but by the fault of their translator.

W. C.

380.—TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

ON A PASSAGE IN HORACE.

WESTON-UNDERWOOD, *December* 5, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your last brought me two cordials; for what can better deserve that name than the cordial approbation of two such readers as your brother, the bishop, and your good friend and neighbour, the clergyman? The former I have ever esteemed and honoured with the justest cause, and am as ready to honour and esteem the latter as you can wish me to be, and as his virtues and talents deserve. Do I hate a parson? Heaven forbid! I love you all when you are good for any thing; and as to the rest, I would mend them if I could, and that is the worst of my intentions towards them.

I heard, above a month since, that this first edition of my work was at that time nearly sold. It will not, therefore, I presume, be long before I must go to press again. This I mention merely from an earnest desire to avail myself of all other strictures that either your good neighbour, Lord Bagot, the bishop, or yourself,

πάντων ἐκπαγλότατ' ἀνδρῶν,

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may happen to have made, and will be so good as to favour me with. Those of the good Evander contained in your last have served me well, and I have already, in the three different places referred to, accommodated the text to them. And this I have done in one instance even a little against the bias of my own opinion.

> - - - - - - - - - ἰγὼ δέ κεν αὐτὸς ἕλωμαι
> Ἑλλὰν σὺν πλείῃσι.

The sense I had given of these words is the sense in which an old scholiast has understood them, as appears in Clarke's note in loco. Clarke, indeed, prefers the other; but it does not appear plain to me that he does it with good reason against the judgment of a very ancient commentator, and a Grecian. And I am the rather inclined to this persuasion, because Achilles himself seems to have apprehended that Agamemnon would not content himself with Briseis only, when he says,—

> But I have OTHER precious things on board,
> Of THESE take NONE away without my leave, &c.

It is certain that the words are ambiguous, and that the sense of them depends altogether on the punctuation. But I am always under the correction of so able a critic as your neighbour, and have altered, as I say, my version accordingly.

As to Milton, the die is cast. I am engaged, have bargained with Johnson, and cannot recede. I should otherwise have been glad to do as you advise, to make the translation of his Latin and Italian, part of another volume; for, with such an addition, I have nearly as much verse in my budget as would be required for the purpose. This squabble, in the meantime, between Fuseli and Boydell,* does not interest me at all; let it terminate as it may, I have only to perform my job, and leave the event to be decided by the combatants.

> Suave mari magno turbantibus æquora ventis
> E terra ingentem alterius spectare laborem.

Adieu, my dear friend, I am most sincerely yours,

W. C.

* Boydell, Alderman, Sheriff, and Lord Mayor of London, originally an engraver, a great patron of artists, and collector of the Shakespeare Gallery, to which Fuseli contributed the cause of a dispute here mentioned. Boydell died in 1804.

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Why should you suppose that I did not admire the poem you shewed me? I did admire it, and told you so, but you carried it off in your pocket, and so doing, left me to forget it, and without the means of inquiry.

I am thus nimble in answering, merely with a view to ensure myself the receipt of other remarks in time for a new impression.

381.—TO THE REV. JAMES HURDIS.

MILTON'S LATIN POEMS.

WESTON, *December* 10, 1791.

DEAR SIR,—I am much obliged to you for wishing that I were employed in some original work rather than a translation. To tell the truth, I am of your mind; and unless I could find another Homer, I shall promise, I believe, and vow, when I have done with Milton, never to translate again. But my veneration for our great countryman is equal to what I feel for the Grecian; and consequently I am happy, and feel myself honourably employed whatever I do for Milton. I am now translating his *Epitaphium Damonis*, a pastoral, in my judgment, equal to any of Virgil's Bucolics, but of which Dr Johnson (so it pleased him) speaks, as I remember, contemptuously. But he who never saw any beauty in a rural scene, was not likely to have much taste for a pastoral. *In pace quiescat!**

I was charmed with your friendly offer to be my advocate with the public; should I want one, I know not where I could find a better. The reviewer in the Gentleman's Magazine grows more and more civil. Should he continue to sweeten at this rate, as he proceeds, I know not what will become of all the little modesty I have left. I have availed myself of some of his strictures, for I wish to learn from every body.

W. C.

* Milton's poem is unquestionably beautiful as a poetical exercise, but contemptible as an expression of grief for the premature loss of a beloved friend. No man ever sorrowed as a shepherd, and called upon his sheep to sympathize with his grief, who was in earnest, or wished to be thought so. Dr Johnson is right, therefore, even had he, in this respect, spoken contemptuously of Virgil himself.

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382.—TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

MRS UNWIN'S ILLNESS.

THE LODGE, *December* 21, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It grieves me, after having indulged a little hope that I might see you in the holydays, to be obliged to disappoint myself. The occasion, too, is such as will ensure me your sympathy.

On Saturday last, while I was at my desk near the window, and Mrs Unwin at the fireside opposite to it, I heard her suddenly exclaim, "Oh! Mr Cowper, don't let me fall!" I turned and saw her actually falling, together with her chair, and started to her side just in time to prevent her. She was seized with a violent giddiness, which lasted, though with some abatement, the whole day, and was attended, too, with some other very, very alarming symptoms. At present, however, she is relieved from the vertigo, and seems in all respects better.

She has been my faithful and affectionate nurse for many years, and consequently has a claim on all my attentions. She has them, and will have them as long as she wants them; which will probably be, at the best, a considerable time to come. I feel the shock, as you may suppose, in every nerve. God grant that there may be no repetition of it! Another such a stroke upon her would, I think, overset me completely; but at present I hold up bravely. W. C.

383.—TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

REVIEW OF HIS HOMER—TRANSLATION OF MILTON'S POEMS.

WESTON-UNDERWOOD, *February* 14, 1792.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It is the only advantage, I believe, that they who love each other derive from living at a distance, that the news of such ills as may happen to either seldom reaches the other till the cause of complaint is over. Had I been your next neighbour I should have suffered with you during the whole indisposition of your two children, and your own. As it is, I have nothing to do but to rejoice in your own recovery and theirs, which I do sincerely, and wish only to learn from yourself that it is complete.

I thank you for suggesting the omission of the line due to

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the helmet of Achilles. How the omission happened I know not, whether by my fault or the printer's; it is certain, however, that I had translated it, and I have now given it its proper place.

I purpose to keep back a second edition till I have had an opportunity to avail myself of the remarks both of friends and strangers. The ordeal of criticism still awaits me in the reviews, and probably they will all in their turn mark many things that may be mended. By the Gentleman's Magazine I have already profited in several instances. My reviewer there, though favourable in the main, is a pretty close observer, and though not always right, is often so.

In the affair of Milton I will have no *horrida bella* if I can help it. It is at least my present purpose to avoid them if possible. For which reason, unless I should soon see occasion to alter my plan, I shall confine myself merely to the business of an annotator, which is my proper province, and shall sift out of Warton's notes every tittle that relates to the private character, political or religious principles, of my author. These are properly subjects for a biographer's handling, but by no means, as it seems to me, for a commentator's. *

In answer to your question if I have had a correspondence with the Chancellor — I reply, Yes. We exchanged three or four letters on the subject of Homer, or rather on the subject of my Preface. He was doubtful whether or not my preference of blank verse, as affording opportunity for a closer version, was well founded. On this subject he wished to be convinced; defended rhyme with much learning, and much shrewd reasoning, but at last allowed me the honour of the victory, expressing himself in these words:—"I am clearly convinced that Homer may be best rendered in blank verse, and you have succeeded in the passages that I have looked into."

Thus it is when a wise man differs in opinion. Such a man will be candid; and conviction, not triumph, will be his object.

Adieu! The hard name I gave you I take to myself, and am your ἐκπαγλότατος W. C.

* This is really amiable, and worthy of Cowper's feelings. In the same spirit of reconciliation he writes to Johnson, his publisher and employer, that he had omitted all the poems on the Gunpowder Treason, and all those against the Papists, because they were expressed with an asperity unbecoming in Milton. See Preface to Cowper's Milton.

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384. — TO THE LORD THURLOW.

ON RHYME AND BLANK VERSE.

My Lord, — A letter reached me yesterday, from Henry Cowper, enclosing another from your Lordship to himself, of which a passage in my work formed the subject. It gave me the greatest pleasure; your strictures are perfectly just, and here follows the speech of Achilles accommodated to them *

* * * * * * *

I did not expect to find your Lordship on the side of rhyme, remembering well with how much energy and interest I have heard you repeat passages from the Paradise Lost, which you could not have recited as you did, unless you had been perfectly sensible of their music. It comforts me therefore to know that if you have an ear for rhyme, you have an ear for blank verse also.

It seems to me that I may justly complain of rhyme as an inconvenience in translation, even though I assert in the sequel that to me it has been easier to rhyme than to write without, because I always suppose a rhyming translator to ramble, and always obliged to do so. Yet I allow your Lordship's version of this speech of Achilles to be very close, and closer much than mine. But I believe that should either your Lordship or I give them burnish or elevation, your lines would be found, in measure as they acquired stateliness, to have lost the merit of fidelity,—in which case nothing more would be done than Pope has done already.

I cannot ask your Lordship to proceed in your strictures, though I should be happy to receive more of them. Perhaps it is possible that when you retire into the country, you may now and then amuse yourself with my translation. Should your remarks reach me, I promise faithfully that they shall be all most welcome, not only as yours, but because I am sure my work will be the better for them.

With sincere and fervent wishes for your Lordship's health and happiness, I remain, my Lord, &c. W. C.*

* TO WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.

FROM LORD THURLOW.

Dear Cowper,—On coming to town this morning, I was surprised, particularly at receiving from you an answer to a scrawl I sent Harry, which I have forgot too much to resume now. But I think I could not

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385. — TO THE LORD THURLOW.

THE SAME SUBJECT.

My Lord,— We are of one mind as to the agreeable effect of rhyme, or Euphony, in the lighter kinds of poetry. The pieces which your Lordship mentions would certainly be

mean to patronize rhyme. I have fancied that it was introduced to mark the measure in modern languages, because they are less numerous and metrical than the ancient, and the name seems to import as much. Perhaps there was melody in ancient song without straining it to musical notes, as the common Greek pronunciation is said to have had the compass of five parts of an octave. But surely that word is only figuratively applied to modern poetry: Euphony seems to be the highest term it will bear. I have fancied also that euphony is an impression derived a good deal from habit, rather than suggested by nature; therefore, in some degree accidental, and consequently conventional. Else, why can't we bear a drama with rhyme, or the French, one without it? Suppose the Rape of the Lock, Windsor Forest, L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, and many other little poems which please, stripped of the rhyme, which might easily be done, would they please as well? It would be unfair to treat rondeaus, ballads, and odes in the same manner, because rhyme makes in some sort a part of the conceit. It was this way of thinking which made me suppose, that habitual prejudice would miss the rhyme; and that neither Dryden or Pope would have dared to give their great authors in blank verse.

I wondered to hear you say you thought rhyme easier in original compositions; but you explained it, that you could go farther a-field if you were pushed for want of a rhyme. An expression preferred for the sake of the rhyme looks as if it were worth more than you allow. But to be sure, in translation, the necessity of rhyme imposes very heavy fetters upon those who mean translation, not paraphrase. Our common heroick metre is enough; the pure iambick, bearing only a sparing introduction of spondees, trochees, &c. to vary the measure.

Mere translation I take to be impossible, if no metre were required. But the difference of the iambick and heroick measure destroys that at once. It is also impossible to obtain the same sense from a dead language, and an ancient author, which those of his own time and country conceived; words and phrases contract, from time and use, such strong shades of difference from their original import. In a living language, with the familiarity of a whole life, it is not easy to conceive truly the actual sense of current expressions, much less of older authors. No two languages furnish *equipollent* words,—their phrases differ, their syntax and their idoms still more widely. But a translation, strictly so called, requires an exact conformity in all those particulars, and also in numbers; therefore, it is impossible. I really think at present, notwithstanding the opinion expressed in your Preface, that a translator asks himself a good question, How would my author have expressed the sentence I am turning, in English? for every idea conveyed in the original should be expressed in English, as literally and fully as the genius, and use, and character of the language will admit of.

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spoiled by the loss of it, and so would all such. The Alma would lose all its neatness and smartness, and Hudibras all its humour. But in grave poems of extreme length, I apprehend that the case is different. Long before I thought of commencing poet myself, I have complained, and heard others complain, of the wearisomeness of such poems. Not

In the passage before us ατττα was the fondling expression of childhood to its parent; and, to those who first translated the lines, conveyed feelingly that amiable sentiment. Γεραι expressed the reverence which naturally accrues to age.

Διογεφης implies an history. Hospitality was an article of religion, strangers were supposed to be sent by God, and honoured accordingly. Jove's altar was placed in ξενοδοχιον. Phœnix had been describing that as his situation in the court of Peleus; and his Διογεφις refers to it. But you must not translate that literally, —

Old daddy Phœnix, a God-send for us to maintain.

Precious limbs was at first an expression of great feeling, till vagabonds, draymen, &c. brought upon it the character of coarseness and ridicule.

It would run to great length, if I were to go through this one speech thus—this is enough for an example of my idea, and to prove the necessity of farther deviation; which still is departing from the author, and justifiable only by strong necessity, such as should not be admitted, till the sense of the original had been laboured to the utmost, and been found irreducible.

I will end this by giving you the strictest translation I can invent, leaving you the double task of bringing it closer, and of polishing it into the style of poetry.

Ah! Phœnix, aged Father, guest of Jove!
I relish no such honours: for my hope
Is to be honour'd by Jove's fated will,
Which keeps me close beside these sable ships,
Long as the breath shall in my bosom stay,
Or as my precious knees retain their spring.
Farther, I say — and cast it in your mind! —
Melt not my spirit down by weeping thus,
And wailing, only for that great man's sake,
Atrides: neither ought you love that man,
Lest I should hate the friend I love so well.
With me united, 'tis your nobler part
To gall his spirit, who has galled mine.
With me reign equal, half my honours share.
These will report; stay you here, and repose
On a soft bed; and with the beaming morn
Consult we, whether to go home or stay.

I have thought that *hero* has contracted a different sense than it had in Homer's time, and is better rendered *great man:* but I am aware that the encliticks and other little words, falsely called expletives, are not introduced even so much as the genius of our language would admit. The euphony I leave entirely to you. Adieu!

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that I suppose that tedium the effect of rhyme itself, but rather of the perpetual recurrence of the same pause and cadence unavoidable in the English couplet.

I hope I may say truly, it was not in a spirit of presumption that I undertook to do what, in your Lordship's opinion, neither Dryden or Pope would have dared to do. On the contrary, I see not how I could have escaped that imputation, had I followed Pope in his own way. A closer translation was called for. I verily believed that rhyme had betrayed Pope into *his* deviations. For me, therefore, to have used his mode of versifying, would have been to expose myself to the same miscarriage, at the same time that I had not his talents to atone for it.

I agree with your Lordship that a translation perfectly close is impossible, because time has sunk the original strict import of a thousand phrases, and we have no means of recovering it. But if we cannot be unimpeachably faithful, that is no reason why we should not be as faithful as we can; and if blank verse afford the fairest chance, then it claims the preference.

Your Lordship, I will venture to say, can command me nothing in which I will not obey with the greatest alacrity.

Ει δυναμαι τιλεσαι γε και ει τετιλεσμενον εστι.

But when, having made as close a translation as even you can invent, you enjoin me to make it still closer, and in rhyme too, I can only reply, as Horace to Augustus,

——cupidum, pater optime, vires
Deficiunt——

I have not treacherously departed from my pattern that I might seem to give some proof of the justness of my own opinion, but have fairly and honestly adhered as closely to it as I could. Yet your Lordship will not have to compliment me on my success, either in respect of the poetical merit of my lines, or of their fidelity. They have just enough of each to make them deficient in the other.

Oh Phœnix, father, friend, guest sent from Jove!
Me no such honours as they yield can move,
For I expect my honours from above.
Here Jove has fix'd me; and while breath and sense
Have place within me, I will never hence.
Hear, too, and mark me well—haunt not mine ears
With sighs, nor seek to melt me with thy tears
For yonder chief, lest, urging such a plea
Through love of him, thou hateful prove to me.

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Thy friendship for thy friend shall brighter shine
Wounding his spirit who has wounded mine.
Divide with me the honours of my throne—
These shall return, and make their tidings known,
But go not thou—thy couch shall here be dress'd
With softest fleeces for thy easy rest,
And with the earliest blush of op'ning day
We will consult to seek our home, or stay.

Since I wrote these I have looked at Pope's. I am certainly somewhat closer to the original than he, but farther I say not. I shall wait with impatience for your Lordship's conclusions from these premises, and remain, in the meantime, with great truth, my Lord, &c. W. C.

386.—TO THE LORD THURLOW.

HOMER.

My Lord,—I haunt you with letters, but will trouble you now with a short line, only to tell your Lordship how happy I am that any part of my work has pleased you. I have a comfortable consciousness that the whole has been executed with equal industry and attention; and am, my Lord, with many thanks to you for snatching such a hasty moment to write to me,* your Lordship's obliged and affectionate humble servant, Wm. Cowper.

*TO WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.

FROM LORD THURLOW.

Dear Cowper,—I have received your letter on my journey through London, and as the chaise waits I shall be short.

I did not mean it as a sign of any presumption that you have attempted what neither Dryden nor Pope would have dared; but merely as a proof of their addiction to rhyme; for I am clearly convinced that Homer may be better translated than into rhyme, and that you have succeeded in the places I have looked into. But I have fancied that it might have been still more literal, preserving the ease of genuine English and melody, and some degree of that elevation which Homer derives from simplicity. But I could not do it, or even near enough to form a judgment, or more than a fancy about it. Nor do I fancy it could be done "stans pede in uno." But when the mind has been fully impregnated with the original passage, often revolving it and waiting for a happy moment may still be necessary to the best trained mind. Adieu.

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387.—TO THE REV. MR HURDIS.

PROGRESS OF THE TRANSLATIONS OF MILTON.

WESTON, *February* 21, 1792.

MY DEAR SIR,—My obligations to you on the score of your kind and friendly remarks demanded from me a much more expeditious acknowledgment of the numerous packets that contained them; but I have been hindered by many causes, each of which you would admit as a sufficient apology, but none of which I will mention, lest I should give too much of my paper to the subject. My acknowledgments are likewise due to your fair sister, who has transcribed so many sheets in so neat a hand, and with so much accuracy.*

At present I have no leisure for Homer, but shall certainly find leisure to examine him with a reference to your strictures, before I send him a second time to the printer. This I am at present unwilling to do, choosing rather to wait, if that may be, till I shall have undergone the discipline of all the reviewers; none of whom have yet taken me in hand, the Gentleman's Magazine excepted. By several of his remarks I have benefited, and shall no doubt be benefited by the remarks of all.

Milton at present engrosses me altogether. His Latin pieces I have translated, and have begun with the Italian. These are few, and will not detain me long. I shall then proceed immediately to deliberate upon, and to settle the plan of my commentary, which I have hitherto had but little time to consider. I look forward to it, for this reason, with some anxiety. I trust, at least, that this anxiety will cease when I have once satisfied myself about the best manner of conducting it. But after all, I seem to fear more the labour to which it calls me, than any great difficulty with which it is likely to be attended. To the labours of versifying I have no objection, but to the labours of criticism I am new, and apprehend that I shall find them wearisome. Should that be the case, I shall be dull, and must be contented to share the censure of being so, with almost all the commentators that have ever existed.

I have expected, but not wondered that I have not received,

* This refers to notes from Warton's edition of Milton's Latin poems.

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Sir Thomas More,* and the other MSS. you promised me, because my silence has been such, considering how loudly I was called upon to write, that you must have concluded me either dead or dying, and did not choose, perhaps, to trust them to executors. W. C.

388.—TO THE REV. MR HURDIS.

THANKS FOR HIS REMARKS ON HOMER—DEPARTURE OF THE THROCKMORTONS.

WESTON, *March* 2, 1792.

MY DEAR SIR,—I have this moment finished a comparison of your remarks with my text, and feel so sensibly my obligations to your great accuracy and kindness that I cannot deny myself the pleasure of expressing them immediately. I only wish that instead of revising the two first books of the Iliad, you could have found leisure to revise the whole two poems, sensible how much my work would have benefited.

I have not always adopted your lines, though often perhaps at least as good as my own; because there will and must be dissimilarity of manner between two so accustomed to the pen as we are. But I have let few passages go unamended, which you seemed to think exceptionable; and this not at all from complaisance; for in such a cause I would not sacrifice an iota on that principle, but on clear conviction.

I have as yet heard nothing from Johnson about the two MSS. you announce, but feel ashamed that I should want your letter to remind me of your obliging offer to inscribe Sir Thomas More to me, should you resolve to publish him. Of my consent to such a measure you need not doubt. I am covetous of respect and honour from all such as you.

Tame hare, at present, I have none; but to make amends, I have a beautiful little spaniel, called Beau, to whom I will give the kiss your sister Sally intended for the former, unless she should command me to bestow it elsewhere. It shall attend on her directions.

I am going to take a last dinner with a most agreeable family, who have been my only neighbours ever since I have lived at Weston. On Monday they go to London, and in the summer to an estate in Oxfordshire, which is to be their home in future. The occasion is not at all a pleasant one to me, nor does it leave me spirits to add more than that I am, dear sir, most truly yours, W. C.

* A tragedy by Mr Hurdis.

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389. — TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

SPRING — DOMESTIC INCIDENTS.

WESTON, *March* 11, 1792.

MY DEAREST JOHNNY, — You talk of primroses that you pulled on Candlemas Day; but what think you of me who heard a nightingale on New Year's Day? Perhaps I am the only man in England who can boast of such good fortune — good indeed, for if it was at all an omen, it could not be an unfavourable one. The winter, however, is now making himself amends, and seems the more peevish for having been encroached on at so undue a season. Nothing less than a large slice out of the spring will satisfy him.

Lady Hesketh left us yesterday. She intended, indeed, to have left us four days sooner; but in the evening before the day fixed for her departure, snow enough fell to occasion just so much delay of it.

We have faint hopes that in the month of May we shall see her again. I know that you have had a letter from her, and you will, no doubt, have the grace not to make her wait long for an answer.

We expect Mr Rose on Tuesday, but he stays with us only till the Saturday following. With him I shall have some conferences on the subject of Homer, — respecting a new edition I mean, and some, perhaps, on the subject of Milton; on him I have not yet begun to comment, or even fix the time when I shall. — Forget not your promised visit!

W. C.

390. — TO THE REV. MR HURDIS.

TRAGEDY OF SIR THOMAS MORE.

WESTON, *March* 23, 1792.

MY DEAR SIR, — I have read your play carefully, and with great pleasure; it seems now to be a performance that cannot fail to do you much credit. Yet, unless my memory deceives me, the scene between Cecilia and Heron, in the garden, has lost something that pleased me much when I saw it first; and I am not sure that you have not likewise obliterated an account of Sir Thomas's execution, that I found very pathetic. It would be strange if, in these two particulars, I should seem

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to miss what never existed; you will presently know whether I am as good at remembering what I never saw, as I am at forgetting what I have seen. But if I am right, I cannot help recommending the omitted passages to your reconsideration. If the play were designed for representation, I should be apt to think Cecilia's first speech rather too long, and should prefer to have it broken into dialogue, by an interposition now and then from one of her sisters. But since it is designed, as I understand, for the closet only, that objection seems of no importance; at no rate, however, would I expunge it; because it is both prettily imagined, and elegantly written.

I have read your *cursory remarks*, * and am much pleased both with the style and the argument. Whether the latter be new or not, I am not competent to judge; if it be, you are entitled to much praise for the invention of it. Where other data are wanting to ascertain the time when an author of many pieces wrote each in particular, there can be no better criterion by which to determine the point, than the more or less proficiency manifested in the composition. Of this proficiency, where it appears, and of those plays in which it appears not, you seem to me to have judged well and truly; and consequently I approve of your arrangement.

I attended, as you desired me, in reading the character of Cecilia, to the hint you gave me concerning your sister Sally, and give you joy of such a sister. This, however, not exclusively of the rest, for though they may not all be Cecilias, I have a strong persuasion that they are all very amiable.

W. C.

391. — TO LADY HESKETH.

COMMENCEMENT OF THE CORRESPONDENCE WITH HAYLEY.

THE LODGE, *March* 25, 1792.

MY DEAREST COZ, — Mr Rose's longer stay than he at first intended was the occasion of the longer delay of my answer to your note, as you may both have perceived by the date thereof, and learned from his information. It was a daily trouble to me to see it lying in the window seat, while I knew you were in expectation of its arrival. By this time, I presume, you have seen him, and have seen likewise Mr

* Cowper here refers to the "Cursory Remarks on the Age of some Greek Plays."

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Hayley's * friendly letter and complimentary sonnet, as well as the letter of the honest Quaker; all of which, at least the two former, I shall be glad to receive again at a fair opportunity. Mr Hayley's letter slept six weeks in Johnson's custody. It was necessary I should answer it without delay, and accordingly I answered it the very evening on which I

* For farther particulars on this subject, see Life. Here, on the first occurrence of his name, it may be proper to remind the reader, that Hayley, the friend and biographer of Cowper, was born at Chester, 1745, and died in 1820. His numerous writings are not inelegant, but are laboured, and want force. The "Triumphs of Temper" is, however, praised by Byron. The first letter addressed by Hayley to Cowper, is here inserted.

"*February* 7, 1792, *Eartham, near* Chichester.

"Dear Sir,

"I have often been tempted, by affectionate admiration of your poetry, to trouble you with a letter; but I have repeatedly checked myself, in recollecting that the vanity of believing ourselves distantly related in spirit to a man of genius, is but a sorry apology for intruding on his time.

"Though I resisted my desire of professing myself your friend, that I might not disturb you with intrusive familiarity, I cannot resist a desire, equally affectionate, of disclaiming an idea which I am told is imputed to me, of considering myself, on a recent occasion, as an antagonist to you. Allow me, therefore, to say, I was solicited to write a Life of Milton, for Boydell and Nicholl, before I had the least idea that you and Mr Fuseli were concerned in a project similar to theirs. When I first heard of your intention, I was apprehensive that we might undesignedly thwart each other; but on seeing your proposals, I am agreeably persuaded, that our respective labours will be far from clashing; as it is your design to illustrate Milton with a series of notes, and I only mean to execute a more candid life of him than his late biographer has given us, upon a plan that will, I flatter myself, be particularly pleasing to those who love the author as we do.

"As to the pecuniary interest of those persons who venture large sums in expensive decoration of Milton, I am persuaded his expanding glory will support them all. Every splendid edition, where the merits of the pencil are in any degree worthy of the poet, will, I think, be secure of success. I wish it cordially to all; as I have great affection for the arts, and a sincere regard for those whose talents reflect honour upon them.

"To you, my dear Sir, I have a grateful attachment, for the infinite delight which your writings have afforded me; and if, in the course of your work, I have any opportunity to serve or oblige you, I shall seize it with that friendly spirit which has impelled me at present to assure you, both in prose and rhyme, that I am your very cordial admirer,

W. Hayley.

P.S. I wrote the enclosed Sonnet on being told that our names had been idly printed together, in a newspaper, *as hostile competitors*. Pray forgive its partial defects for its affectionate sincerity.

From my ignorance of your address, I send this to your booksellers

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received it, giving him to understand, among other things, how much vexation the bookseller's folly had cost me, who had detained it so long; especially on account of the distress that I knew it must have occasioned to him also. From his reply, which the return of the post brought me, I learn that in the long interval of my noncorrespondence he had suffered anxiety and mortification enough; so much, that I dare say he made twenty vows never to hazard again either letter or compliment to an unknown author. What, indeed, could he imagine less, than that I meant by such an obstinate silence to tell him that I valued neither him nor his praises, nor his proffered friendship — in short, that I considered him as a rival, and therefore, like a true author, hated and despised him. He is now, however, convinced that I love him, as indeed I do, and I account him the chief acquisition that my own verse has ever procured me. Brute should I be if I did not, for he promises me every assistance in his power.

I have likewise a very pleasing letter from Mr Park, which I wish you were here to read; and a very pleasing poem that came enclosed in it for my revisal, written when he was only twenty years of age, yet wonderfully well written, though wanting some correction.

by a person commissioned to place my name in the list of your subscribers; and let me add, if you ever wish to form a new collection of names for any similar purpose, I entreat you to honour me so far as to rank mine, of your own accord, among those of your sincerest friends, — Adieu!

SONNET

TO WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.

ON HEARING THAT OUR NAMES HAD BEEN IDLY MENTIONED IN A NEWSPAPER, AS COMPETITORS IN A LIFE OF MILTON.

Cowper! delight of all who justly prize
The splendid magic of a strain divine,
That sweetly tempts th' enlighten'd soul to rise,
As sunbeams lure an eagle to the skies.
Poet! to whom I feel my heart incline
As to a friend endear'd by virtue's ties;
Ne'er shall my name in pride's contentious line
With hostile emulation cope with thine!
No, let us meet, with kind fraternal aim,
Where Milton's shrine invites a votive throng.
With thee I share a passion for his fame,
His zeal for truth, his scorn of venal blame:
But thou hast rarer gifts,—to thee belong
His harp of highest tone, his sanctity of song

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To Mr Hurdis I return Sir Thomas More to-morrow; having revised it a second time. He is now a very respectable figure, and will do my friend, who gives him to the public this spring, considerable credit. W. C.

392.—TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

MR PARK'S POEM.

March 30, 1792.

My dear Friend,—My mornings, ever since you went, have been given to my correspondents; this morning I have already written a long letter to Mr Park, giving my opinion of his poem, which is a favourable one. I forget whether I shewed it to you when you were here, and even whether I had then received it. He has genius and delicate taste; and if he were not an engraver, might be one of our first hands in poetry. W. C.

393.—TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

MUTUAL ACTS OF FRIENDSHIP—PRINTERS—DR ROBERTSON'S OPINION OF HIS VERSION OF HOMER.

Weston, *April* 5, 1792.

You talk, my dear friend, as John Bunyan * says, like one that has the egg shell still upon his head. You talk of the mighty favours that you have received from me, and forget entirely those for which I am indebted to you; but though you forget them, I shall not, nor ever think that I have requited you, so long as any opportunity presents itself of rendering you the smallest service: small, indeed, is all that I can ever hope to render.

You now perceive, and sensibly, that not without reason I complained as I used to do of those tiresome rogues the printers. Bless yourself that you have not two thick quartos to bring forth as I had. My vexation was always much increased by this reflection,—they are every day, and all day long, employed in printing for somebody, and why not for me? This was adding mortification to disappointment, so that I often lost all patience.

* This extraordinary man was born 1628, the son of a travelling tinker, near Bedford, where, after a wandering dissipated life, and serving in the parliamentary army, he became an Anabaptist preacher; and in the jail of that city, during an imprisonment of thirteen years, he composed the "Pilgrim's Progress," and other works, originally printed in two volumes, folio. He died in 1688.

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The suffrage of Dr Robertson * makes more than amends for the scurvy jest passed upon me by the wag unknown. I regard him not; nor, except for about two moments after I first heard of his doings, have I ever regarded him. I have somewhere a secret enemy; I know not for what cause he should be so; but he, I imagine, supposes that he has a cause. It is well, however, to have but one; and I will take all the care I can not to increase the number.

I have begun my notes, and am playing the commentator manfully. The worst of it is that I am anticipated in almost all my opportunities to shine by those who have gone before me.

W. C.

394.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

COMMENCEMENT OF THEIR FRIENDSHIP — INVITATION TO WESTON — SKETCH OF THE POET'S PREVIOUS LIFE.

WESTON, *April* 6, 1792.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—God grant that this friendship of ours may be a comfort to us all the rest of our days, in a world where true friendships are rarities, and especially where suddenly formed they are apt soon to terminate! But as I said before, I feel a disposition of heart toward you that I never felt for one whom I had never seen: and that shall prove itself I trust in the event a propitious omen.

* * * * * * * *

Horace says somewhere, though I may quote it amiss perhaps, for I have a terrible memory,

> Utrumque nostrum incredibili modo
> Consentit astrum.———

* * * Our *stars consent*, at least have had an influence somewhat similar, in another and more important article. * * *

It gives me the sincerest pleasure that I may hope to see you at Weston; for as to any migrations of mine, they must, I fear, notwithstanding the joy I should feel in being a guest of yours, be still considered in the light of impossibilities. Come then, my friend, and be as welcome, as the country people say here, as the flowers in May! I am happy, as I say, in the expectation, but the fear, or rather the consciousness,

* Principal Robertson, of Edinburgh, the celebrated historian, born 1721, and died about nine months after the date of this letter.

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that I shall not answer on a nearer view, makes it a trembling kind of happiness, and a doubtful.

After the privacy which I have mentioned above, I went to Huntingdon: soon after my arrival there, I took up my quarters at the house of the Rev. Mr Unwin; I lived with him while he lived, and ever since his death have lived with his widow. Her, therefore, you will find mistress of the house; and I judge of you amiss, or you will find her just such as you would wish. To me she has been often a nurse, and invariably the kindest friend, through a thousand adversities that I have had to grapple with in the course of almost thirty years. I thought it better to introduce her to you thus, than to present her to you at your coming, quite a stranger.

Bring with you any books that you think may be useful to my commentatorship, for with you for an interpreter I shall be afraid of none of them. And in truth, if you think that you shall want them, you must bring books for your own use also, for they are an article with which I am *heinously unprovided;* being much in the condition of the man whose library Pope describes as

> ——— no mighty store,
> His own works neatly bound, and little more!

You shall know how this has come to pass hereafter.

Tell me, my friend, are your letters in your own handwriting? If so, I am in pain for your eyes, lest by such frequent demands upon them I should hurt them. I had rather write you three letters for one, much as I prize your letters, than *that* should happen. And now, for the present, adieu. I am going to accompany Milton into the lake of fire and brimstone, having just begun my annotations.

W. C.

395.—TO THE REV. MR HURDIS.

ON FAMILY CONCERNS.

WESTON, *April* 8, 1792.

MY DEAR SIR,—Your entertaining and pleasant letter, resembling in that respect all that I receive from you, deserved a more expeditious answer; and should have had what it so well deserved, had it not reached me at a time when, deeply in debt to all my correspondents, I had letters to write without number. Like autumnal leaves that strew the brooks in

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Vallombrosa, the unanswered farrago lay before me. If I quote at all, you must expect me henceforth to quote none but Milton, since for a long time to come I shall be occupied with him only.

I was much pleased with the extract you gave me from your sister Eliza's letter; she writes very elegantly, and (if I might say it without seeming to flatter you) I should say much in the manner of her brother. It is well for your sister Sally, that gloomy Dis is already a married man; else perhaps finding her, as he found Prosperine, studying botany in the fields, he might transport her to his own flowerless abode, where all her hopes of improvement in that science would be at an end for ever.

What letter of the tenth of December is that which you say you have not yet answered? Consider it is April now, and I never remember any thing that I write half so long. But perhaps it relates to Calchas, for I do remember that you have not yet furnished me with the secret history of him and his family, which I demanded from you.—Adieu. Yours, most sincerely, W. C.

I rejoice that you are so well with the learned Bishop of Sarum, and well remember how he ferreted the vermin Lauder out of all his hidings, when I was a boy at Westminster.*

I have not yet studied with your last remarks before me, but hope soon to find an opportunity.

396.—TO LADY THROCKMORTON.

INTENDED MARRIAGE—A LADY'S THEFT.

WESTON, *April* 16, 1792.

MY DEAR LADY FROG,—I thank you for your letter, as sweet as it was short, and as sweet as good news could make it. You encourage a hope that has made me happy ever since I have entertained it. And if my wishes can hasten the event,

* Dr Douglas, Canon of Windsor, and Bishop of Salisbury, was a native of Scotland, and the author of several excellent works. Cowper here alludes to his pamphlet entitled, *Milton no Plagiary*, in which he detected and exposed an impudent imposture of William Lauder, who by interpolating certain passages from the Adamus Exul of Grotius, from Masenius, and others, with translations from Paradise Lost, endeavoured to fix on Milton the charge of plagiarism from the modern Latin poets.—S.

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it will not be long suspended. As to your jealousy, I mind it not, or only to be pleased with it; I shall say no more on the subject at present than this, that of all ladies living, a certain lady, whom I need not name, would be the lady of my choice for a certain gentleman, were the whole sex submitted to my election.*

What a delightful anecdote is that which you tell me of a young lady detected in the very act of stealing our Catharina's praises; is it possible that she can survive the shame, the mortification of such a discovery? Can she ever see the same company again, or any company that she can suppose by the remotest possibility may have heard the tidings? If she can, she must have an assurance equal to her vanity. A lady in London stole my song on the broken Rose, or rather would have stolen, and have passed it for her own. But she, too, was unfortunate in her attempt; for there happened to be a female cousin of mine in company, who knew that I had written it. It is very flattering to a poet's pride, that the ladies should thus hazard every thing for the sake of appropriating his verses. I may say with Milton, that I am fallen *on evil tongues and evil days*, being not only plundered of that which belongs to me, but being charged with that which does not. Thus it seems (and I have learned it from more quarters than one,) that a report is, and has been some time current in this and the neighbouring counties, that though I have given myself the air of declaiming against the Slave Trade in the Task, I am in reality a friend to it; and last night I received a letter from Joe Rye, to inform me that I have been much traduced and calumniated on this account. Not knowing how I could better or more effectually refute the scandal, I have this morning sent a copy to the Northampton paper, prefaced by a short letter to the printer, specifying the occasion. The verses are in honour of Mr Wilberforce, and sufficiently expressive of my present sentiments on the subject. You are a wicked fair one for disappointing us of our expected visit, and therefore out of mere spite I will not insert them. I have been very ill these ten days, and for the same spite's sake will not tell you what has ailed me. But lest you should die of a fright, I will have the mercy to tell you that I am recovering.

* This passage, so agreeably written, refers to a marriage between Miss Johnson, the poet's Catharina, and George Courtenay Throckmorton, Esq. an union which rendered all parties happy, and to Cowper gave especial satisfaction.

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Mrs G——— and her little ones are gone, but your brother is still here. He told me that he had some expectations of Sir John at Weston; if he come, I shall most heartily rejoice once more to see him at a table so many years his own.*

W. C.

397. — TO THE REV. J. JEKYLL RYE.†

ON THE SLAVE TRADE — COWPER'S SENTIMENTS MISREPRESENTED.

WESTON, *April* 16, 1792.

MY DEAR SIR, — I am truly sorry that you should have suffered any apprehensions, such as your letter indicates, to molest you for a moment. I believe you to be as honest a man as lives, and consequently do not believe it possible that you could in your letter to Mr Pitts, or any otherwise, wilfully misrepresent me. In fact you did not; my opinions on the subject in question were, when I had the pleasure of seeing you, such as in that letter you stated them to be, and such they still continue.

If any man concludes, because I allow myself the use of sugar and rum, that therefore I am a friend to the *Slave Trade*, he concludes rashly, and does me great wrong; for the man lives not who abhors it more than I do. My reasons for my own practice are satisfactory to myself, and they whose

* The following is the poem referred to in this Letter:

SONNET

TO

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, ESQ.

Thy country, Wilberforce, with just disdain,
Hears thee, by cruel men and impious, call'd
Fanatic, for thy zeal to loose th' enthral'd
From exile, public sale, and slav'ry's chain.
Friend of the poor, the wrong'd, the fetter-gall'd,
Fear not lest labour such as thine be vain!
Thou hast achieved a part, hast gain'd the ear
Of Britain's senate to thy glorious cause:
Hope smiles, joy springs, and though cold caution pause
And weave delay, the better hour is near,
That shall remunerate thy toils severe,
By peace for Afric, fenced with British laws.
Enjoy what thou hast won, — esteem and love
From all the just on earth, and all the blest above!

† This gentleman, a clergyman of Northampton, distinguished himself by his zeal against the Slave Trade.

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practice is contrary, are, I suppose, satisfied with theirs. So far is good. Let every man act according to his own judgment and conscience; but if we condemn another for not seeing with our eyes, we are unreasonable; and if we reproach him on that account, we are uncharitable, which is a still greater evil.

I had heard, before I recived the favour of yours, that such a report of me, as you mention, had spread about the country. But my information told me that it was founded thus: The people of Olney petitioned Parliament for the abolition — my name was sought among the subscribers, but was not found — a question was asked, how that happened? Answer was made, that I had once indeed been an enemy to the Slave Trade, but had changed my mind; for that having lately read a history or an account of Africa, I had seen it there asserted, that till the commencement of that traffic, the negroes, multiplying at a prodigious rate, were necessitated to devour each other; for which reason I had judged it better that the trade should continue, than that they should be again reduced to so horrid a custom.

Now all this is a fable. I have read no such history; I never in my life read any such assertion; nor, had such an assertion presented itself to me, should I have drawn any such conclusion from it: on the contrary, bad as it were, I think it would be better the negroes should even eat one another, than that we should carry them to market. The single reason why I did not sign the petition was, because I was never asked to do it; and the reason why I was never asked was, because I am not a parishioner of Olney.

Thus stands the matter. You will do me the justice, I dare say, to speak of me as of a man who abhors the commerce, which is now I hope in a fair way to be abolished, as often as you shall find occasion. And I beg you henceforth to do yourself the justice to believe it impossible, that I should for a moment suspect you of duplicity or misrepresentation. I have been grossly slandered, but neither by you, nor in consequence of any thing that you have either said or written. I remain therefore, still as heretofore, with great respect, *much and truly* yours, W. C.

Mrs Unwin's compliments attend you.

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398. — TO LADY HESKETH.

MISS JOHNSON'S MARRIAGE — DR MADAN — WARREN HASTINGS.

WESTON, *May* 5, 1792.

MY DEAREST COZ, — I rejoice, as thou reasonably supposest me to do, in the matrimonial news communicated in your last. Not that it was altogether news to me, for twice I had received broad hints of it from Lady Frog by letter, and several times *viva voce* while she was here. But she enjoined *me* secrecy as well as *you*, and you know that all secrets are safe with me; safer far than the winds in the bags of Æolus. I know not in fact the lady whom it would give me more pleasure to call Mrs Courtenay, than the lady in question; partly because I know her, but especially because I know her to be all that I can wish in a neighbour.*

I have often observed that there is a regular alternation of good and evil in the lot of men, so that a favourable incident may be considered as the harbinger of an unfavourable one, and *vice versa*. Dr Madan's experience witnesses to the truth of this observation. One day he gets a broken head, and the next a mitre to heal it. I rejoice that he has met with so effectual a cure, though my joy is not unmingled with concern; for till now I had some hope of seeing him, but since I live in the North, and his episcopal call is in the West, that is a gratification, I suppose, which I must no longer look for.†

My sonnet, ‡ which I sent you, was printed in the Northampton paper last week, and this week it produced me a complimentary one in the same paper, which served to convince me at least by the matter of it, that my own was not published without occasion, and that it had answered its purpose.

My correspondence with Hayley proceeds briskly, and is very affectionate on both sides. I expect him here in about a fortnight, and wish heartily, with Mrs Unwin, that you would give him a meeting. I have promised him indeed that he shall find us alone; but you are one of the family.

I wish much to print the following lines in one of the daily papers. Lord S———'s vindication of the poor culprit in the

* See note to Letter 396.

† Bishop of Peterborough, brother of Martin Madan, and consequently Cowper's cousin. See Life.

‡ To Mr Wilberforce. See Letter 396.

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affair of Cheit-Sing has confirmed me in the belief that he has been injuriously treated, and I think it an act merely of justice to take a little notice of him.

TO

WARREN HASTINGS, ESQ.

BY

AN OLD SCHOOLFELLOW OF HIS AT WESTMINSTER.

HASTINGS! I knew thee young, and of a mind,
While young, humane, conversable, and kind;
Nor can I well believe thee, gentle THEN,
Now grown a villain, and the WORST of men.
But rather some suspect, who have oppress'd
And worried thee, as not themselves the BEST.

If thou wilt take the pains to send them to thy newsmonger, I hope thou wilt do well. — Adieu! W. C. *

399. — TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

HIS ORDINATION POSTPONED.

WESTON, *May* 20, 1792.

MY DEAREST OF ALL JOHNNIES, — I am not sorry that your ordination is postponed. A year's learning and wisdom, added to your present stock, will not be more than enough to satisfy the demands of your function. Neither am I sorry that you find it difficult to fix your thoughts to the serious point at all times. It proves at least that you attempt, and wish to do it, and these are good symptoms. Wo to those who enter on the ministry of the Gospel without having previously

* Reference has been made in the Life to these lines, as a proof that Cowper never forgot early friendships. Every one now allows the justice of the sentiment which they contain; but it required a degree of fortitude, and a stern consciousness of principle, to oppose the torrent of popular clamour and the iniquity of legal prosecutions then directed against Hastings. He was born at Churchill, in Oxfordshire, 1733, went to India as a civilian at the age of seventeen, whence he returned in 1765; but being named second in council at Madras, he went out again in 1769. In 1773, he was appointed Governor-General, and his administration is one of the most splendid, and occupied the most trying period in the history of British India. On his return in 1786, he was impeached, and, after a trial most unjustly protracted for nine years, finally acquitted in 1795. He died in 1818, leaving behind him many esteemed historical and literary productions.

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asked at least from God a mind and spirit suited to their occupation, and whose experience never differs from itself, because they are always alike vain, light, and inconsiderate. It is therefore matter of great joy to me to hear you complain of levity, and such it is to Mrs Unwin. She is, I thank God, tolerably well, and loves you. As to the time of your journey hither, the sooner after June the better; till then we shall have company.

I forget not my debts to your dear sister, and your aunt Balls. Greet them both with a brother's kiss, and place it to my account. I will write to them when Milton and a thousand other engagements will give me leave. Mr Hayley is here on a visit. We have formed a friendship that I trust will last for life, and render us an example to all future poets.

Adieu! Lose no time in coming after the time mentioned.

W. C.

400. — TO LADY HESKETH.

MRS UNWIN SEIZED WITH PALSY.

WESTON, *May* 24, 1792.

I WISH with all my heart, my dearest Coz, that I had not ill news for the subject of the present letter. My friend, my Mary, has again been attacked by the same disorder that threatened me last year with the loss of her, and of which you were yourself a witness. Gregson would not allow that first stroke to be paralytic, but this he acknowledges to be so; and with respect to the former, I never had myself any doubt that it was; but this has been much the severest. Her speech has been almost unintelligible from the moment that she was struck; it is with difficulty that she opens her eyes, and she cannot keep them open; the muscles necessary to the purpose being contracted; and as to self-moving powers, from place to place, and the use of her right hand and arm, she has entirely lost them.

It has happened well, that of all men living the man most qualified to assist and comfort me is here, though till within these few days I never saw him, and a few weeks since had no expectation that I ever should. You have already guessed that I mean Hayley—Hayley, who loves me as if he had known me from my cradle. When he returns to town, as he must, alas! too soon, he will pay his respects to you.

I will not conclude without adding that our poor patient is

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beginning, I hope, to recover from this stroke also; but her amendment is slow, as must be expected at her time of life, and in such a disorder. I am as well myself as you have ever known me in a time of much trouble, and even better.

It was not possible to prevail on Mrs Unwin to let me send for Dr Kerr, but Hayley has written to his friend Dr Austen a representation of her case, and we expect his opinion and advice to-morrow. In the meantime, we have borrowed an electrical machine from our neighbour Socket, the effect of which she tried yesterday, and the day before, and we think it has been of material service.

She was seized while Hayley and I were walking, and Mr Greatheed, who called while we were absent, was with her.*

I forgot in my last to thank thee for the proposed amendments of thy friend. Whoever he is, make my compliments to him, and thank him. The passages to which he objects have been all altered;† and when he shall see them new dressed, I hope he will like them better. W. C.

401. — TO LADY HESKETH.

THE SAME SUBJECT.

THE LODGE, *May* 26, 1792.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,— Knowing that you will be anxious to learn how we go on, I write a few lines to inform you that Mrs Unwin daily recovers a little strength, and a little power of utterance; but she seems strongest, and her speech is more distinct, in a morning. Hayley has been all in all to us on this very afflictive occasion, Love him, I charge you, dearly for my sake. Where could I have found a man, except himself, who could have made himself so necessary to me in so short a time, that I absolutely know not how to live without him?

Adieu, my dear sweet Coz. Mrs Unwin, as plainly as her poor lips can speak, sends her best love, and Hayley threatens in a few days to lay close siege to your affections in person.

W. C.

There is some hope, I find, that the Chancellor may continue in office, and I shall be glad if he does; because we have no single man worthy to succeed him.

I open my letter again to thank you, my dearest Coz, for

* See Life. † In Homer.

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yours just received. Though happy, as you well know, to see *you* at all times, we have no need, and I trust shall have none, to trouble you with a journey made on purpose; yet once again, I am willing and desirous to believe, we shall be a happy trio at Weston; but unless necessity dictates a journey of charity, I wish all yours hither to be made for pleasure. Farewell.— Thou shalt know how we go on.

402.—TO MRS BODHAM.

MR JOHNSON'S ORDINATION.

WESTON, *June* 4, 1792.

MY DEAREST ROSE,—I am not such an ungrateful and insensible animal, as to have neglected you thus long without a reason.

* * * * *

I cannot say that I am sorry that our dear Johnny finds the pulpit door shut against him at present. He is young, and can afford to wait another year; neither is it to be regretted that his time of preparation for an office of so much importance as that of a minister of God's word, should have been a little protracted. It is easier to direct the movements of a great army, than to guide a few souls to Heaven; the way is narrow, and full of snares, and the guide himself has the most difficulties to encounter. But I trust he will do well. He is single in his views, honest hearted, and desirous, by prayer and study of the Scripture, to qualify himself for the service of his great Master, who will suffer no such man to fail for want of his aid and protection. Adieu. W. C.

403.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

MRS UNWIN'S HEALTH.

WESTON, *June* 4, 1792.

ALL'S WELL,—which words I place as conspicuously as possible, and prefix them to my letter, to save you the pain, my friend and brother, of a moment's anxious speculation. Poor Mary proceeds in her amendment still, and improves, I think, even at a swifter rate than when you left her. The stronger she grows, the faster she gathers strength, which is perhaps the natural course of recovery. She walked so well this morning, that she told me at my first visit she had

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entirely forgot her illness; and she spoke so distinctly, and had so much of her usual countenance, that, had it been possible, she would have made me forget it too.

Returned from my walk, blown to tatters—found two dear things in the study, your letter and my Mary! She is bravely well, and your beloved epistle does us both good. I found your kind pencil note in my song book, as soon as I came down on the morning of your departure; and Mary was vexed to the heart, that the simpletons who watched her supposed her asleep, when she was not; for she learned soon after you were gone, that you would have peeped at her, had you known her to have been awake. I perhaps might have had a peep too, and therefore was as vexed as she; but if it please God, we shall make ourselves large amends for all lost peeps by and by at Eartham. W. C.

404.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

THE SAME SUBJECT.

WESTON, *June* 5, 1792.

YESTERDAY was a noble day with us—speech almost perfect—eyes open almost the whole day, without any effort to keep them so—and the step wonderfully improved. But the night has been almost a sleepless one, owing partly, I believe, to her having had as much sleep again as usual the night before; for even when she is in tolerable health she hardly ever sleeps well two nights together. I found her accordingly a little out of spirits this morning, but still insisting on it that she is better. Indeed, she always tells me so, and will probably die with those very words upon her lips. They will be true then at least, for then she will be best of all. She is now (the clock has just struck eleven) endeavouring, I believe, to get a little sleep; for which reason I do not yet let her know that I have received your letter.

Can I ever honour you enough for your zeal to serve me? Truly I think not: I am, however, so sensible of the love I owe you on this account, that I every day regret the acuteness of your feelings for me, convinced that they expose you to much trouble, mortification, and disappointment. I have, in short, a poor opinion of my destiny, as I told you when you were here; and though I believe that if any man living can do me good, you will, I cannot yet persuade myself that

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even you will be successful in attempting it. But it is no matter, you are yourself a good which I can never value enough, and whether rich or poor in other respects, I shall always account myself better provided for than I deserve, with such a friend at my back as you. Let it please God to continue to me my William and Mary, and I will be more reasonable than to grumble.

I rose this morning wrapped round with a cloud of melancholy, and with a heart full of fears; but if I see Mary's amendment a little advanced, when she rises, I shall be better.

I have just been with her again. Except that she is fatigued for want of sleep, she seems as well as yesterday. The post brings me a letter from Hurdis, who is broken-hearted for a dying sister. Had we eyes sharp enough, we should see the arrows of Death flying in all directions, and account it a wonder that we and our friends escape them but a single day. W. C.

405.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

HIS OWN MELANCHOLY — DOMESTIC INCIDENTS.

WESTON, *June* 7, 1792.

OF what materials can you suppose me made, if after all the rapid proofs that you have given me of your friendship, I do not love you with all my heart, and regret your absence continually? But you must permit me nevertheless to be melancholy now and then; or if you will not, I must be so without your permission; for that sable thread is so intermixed with the very thread of my existence, as to be inseparable from it, at least while I exist in the body. Be content therefore; let me sigh and groan, but always be sure that I love you! You will be well assured that I should not have indulged myself in this rhapsody about myself, and my melancholy, had my present mood been of that complexion, or had not our poor Mary seemed still to advance in her recovery. So in fact she does, and has performed several little feats to-day; such as either she could not perform at all, or very feebly, while you were with us.

I shall be glad if you have seen Johnny, as I call him, my Norfolk cousin; he is a sweet lad, but as shy as a bird. It costs him always two or three days to open his mouth before

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a stranger; but when he does, he is sure to please by the innocent cheerfulness of his conversation. His sister, too, is one of my idols, for the resemblance she bears to my mother.

Mary and you have all my thoughts; and how should it be otherwise? She looks well, is better, and loves you dearly.

Adieu! my dear brother, W. C.

406.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

THE SAME SUBJECT—ARRIVAL OF MR JOHNSON.

WESTON, *June* 10, 1792.

I DO indeed anxiously wish that every thing you do may prosper; and should I at last prosper by your means, shall taste double sweetness in prosperity for that reason.

I rose this morning, as I usually do, with a mind all in sables. In this mood I presented myself to Mary's bedside, whom I found, though after many hours lying awake, yet cheerful, and not to be affected with my desponding humour. It is a great blessing to us both that, poor feeble thing as she is, she has a most invincible courage, and a trust in God's goodness that nothing shakes. She is now in the study, and is certainly in some degree better than she was yesterday, but how to measure that little I know not, except by saying that it is just perceptible.

I am glad that you have seen my Johnny of Norfolk, because I know it will be a comfort to you to have seen your successor. He arrived, to my great joy, yesterday; and not having bound himself to any particular time of going, will, I hope, stay long with us. You are now once more snug in your retreat, and I give you joy of your return to it, after the bustle in which you have lived since you left Weston. Weston mourns your absence, and will mourn it till she sees you again. What is to become of Milton I know not; I do nothing but scribble to you, and seem to have no relish for any other employment. I have, however, in pursuit of your idea, to compliment Darwin, put a few stanzas * together, which I shall subjoin; you will easily give them all that you find they want, and match the song with another.

I am now going to walk with Johnny, much cheered since I began writing to you, and by Mary's looks and good spirits.

W. C.

* Lines addressed to Dr Darwin. See Poems.

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407.—TO LADY HESKETH.

HAYLEY—MRS UNWIN'S HEALTH—RAPID SUCCESSION OF EVENTS.

WESTON, *June* 11, 1792.

MY DEAREST COZ,—Thou art ever in my thoughts, whether I am writing to thee or not; and my correspondence seems to grow upon me at such a rate, that I am not able to address thee so often as I would. In fact, I live only to write letters. Hayley is, as you see, added to the number, and to him I write almost as duly as I rise in the morning; nor is he only added, but his friend Carwardine also—Carwardine the generous, the disinterested, the friendly. I seem, in short, to have stumbled suddenly on a race of heroes, men who resolve to have no interests of their own, till mine are served.

But I will proceed to other matters, that concern me more intimately, and more immediately, than all that can be done for me either by the great, or the small, or by both united. Since I wrote last, Mrs Unwin has been continually improving in strength, but at so gradual a rate that I can only mark it by saying, that she moves about every day with less support than the former. Her recovery is most of all retarded by want of sleep. On the whole, I believe she goes on as well as could be expected, though not quite well enough to satisfy me. And Dr Austen, speaking from the reports I have made of her, says he has no doubt of her restoration.

During the last two months I seem to myself to have been in a dream. It has been a most eventful period, and fruitful to an uncommon degree, both in good and evil. I have been very ill, and suffered excruciating pain. I recovered, and became quite well again. I received within my doors a man, but lately an entire stranger, and who now loves me as his brother, and forgets himself to serve me. Mrs Unwin has been seized with an illness that for many days threatened to deprive me of her, and to cast a gloom, an impenetrable one, on all my future prospects. She is now granted to me again. A few days since I should have thought the moon might have descended into my purse as likely as any emolument, and now it seems not impossible. All this has come to pass with such rapidity as events move with in romance indeed, but not often in real life. Events of all sorts creep or fly exactly as God pleases.

To the foregoing I have to add, in conclusion, the arrival

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of my Johnny, just when I wanted him most, and when only a few days before I had no expectation of him. He came to dinner on Saturday, and I hope I shall keep him long. What comes next I know not, but shall endeavour, as you exhort me, to look for good, and I know I shall have your prayers that I may not be disappointed.

Hayley tells me you begin to be jealous of him, lest I should love him more than I love you, and bids me say, "that should I do so, you in revenge must love him more than I do." Him I know you will love, and me, because you have such a habit of doing it that you cannot help it.

Adieu! my knuckles ache with letter writing. With my poor patient's affectionate remembrances, and Johnny's,

I am ever thine, W. C.

406.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

MRS UNWIN'S CONVALESCENCE—PROPOSED JOURNEY TO EARTHAM.

WESTON, *June* 19, 1792.

* * * * THUS have I filled a whole page to my dear William of Eartham, and have not said a syllable yet about my Mary; a sure sign that she goes on well. Be it known to you that we have these four days discarded our sedan with two elbows. Here is no more carrying, or being carried, but she walks up stairs boldly, with one hand upon the balustrade, and the other under my arm, and in like manner she comes down in a morning. Still I confess she is feeble, and misses much of her former strength. The weather, too, is sadly against her; it deprives her of many a good turn in the orchard, and fifty times have I wished this very day, that Dr Darwin's scheme of giving rudders and sails to the Ice Islands, that spoil all our summers, were actually put into practice. So should we have gentle airs instead of churlish blasts; and those everlasting sources of bad weather being once navigated into the southern hemisphere, my Mary would recover as fast again. We are both of your mind respecting the journey to Eartham, and think that July, if by that time she have strength for the journey, will be better than August. We shall have more long days before us, and then we shall want as much for our return as for our going forth. This, however, must be left to the Giver of all good. If our visit to you be according to His will, He will smooth the way before us, and appoint the time of it;

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and I thus speak, not because I wish to seem a saint in your eyes, but because my poor Mary actually is one, and would not set her foot over the threshold, unless she had, or thought she had, God's free permission. With that she would go through floods and fire, though without it she would be afraid of every thing,—afraid even to visit you, dearly as she loves, and much as she longs to see you.

W. C.

409.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

PROPOSED VISIT TO EARTHAM — CATHARINA.

WESTON, *June* 27, 1792.

WELL, then, let us talk about this journey to Eartham.* You wish me to settle the time of it, and I wish with all my heart to be able to do so, living in hopes meanwhile that I shall be able to do it soon. But some little time must necessarily intervene. Our Mary must be able to walk alone, to cut her own food, to feed herself, and to wear her own shoes, for at present she wears mine. All things considered, my friend and brother, you will see the expediency of waiting a little before we set off to Eartham. We mean, indeed, before that day arrives, to make a trial of the strength of her head, how far it may be able to bear the motion of a carriage, a motion that it has not felt these seven years. I grieve that we are thus circumstanced, and that we cannot gratify ourselves in a delightful and innocent project without all these precautions; but when we have leaf-gold to handle, we must do it tenderly.

I thank you, my brother, both for presenting my authorship to your friend Guy, and for the excellent verses with which you have inscribed your present. There are none neater or better turned—with what shall I requite you? I have nothing to send you but a gimcrack, which I have prepared for my bride and bridegroom neighbours, who are expected to-morrow. You saw in my book a poem entitled Catharina, which concluded with a wish that we had her for a neighbour; this, therefore, is called Catharina, the second part; on her marriage to George Courtenay, Esq.†

* Mr Hayley's seat near Chichester.
† See Poems.

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410.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

LIFE OF MILTON, &c.

WESTON, *July* 4, 1792.

I KNOW not how you proceed in your life of Milton, but I suppose not very rapidly; for while you were here, and since you left us, you have had no other theme but me. As for myself, except my letters to you, and the nuptial song I inserted in my last, I have literally done nothing since I saw you. Nothing, I mean, in the writing way, though a great deal in another; that is to say, in attending my poor Mary, and endeavouring to nurse her up for a journey to Eartham. In this I have hitherto succeeded tolerably well, and had rather carry this point completely, than be the most famous editor of Milton that the world has ever seen, or shall see.

Your humorous descant upon my art of wishing made us merry, and consequently did good to us both. I sent my wish to the Hall yesterday. They are excellent neighbours, and so friendly to me, that I wished to gratify them. When I went to pay my first visit, George flew into the court to meet me, and when I entered the parlour, Catharina sprang into my arms. W. C.

411.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

MRS UNWIN'S HEALTH—COWPER'S PICTURE BY ABBOT.

WESTON, *July* 15, 1792.

THE progress of the old nurse in Terence is very much like the progress of my poor patient in the road of recovery. I cannot, indeed, say that she moves, but advances not, for advances are certainly made, but the progress of a week is hardly perceptible. I know not, therefore, at present, what to say about this long postponed journey. The utmost that it is safe for me to say at this moment is this: You know that you are dear to us both; true it is that you are so, and equally true that the very instant we feel ourselves at liberty, we will fly to Eartham. I have been but once within the Hall door since the Courtenays came home, much as I have been pressed to dine there, and have hardly escaped giving a little offence by declining it; but though I should offend all the

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world by my obstinacy in this instance, I would not leave my poor Mary alone. Johnny serves me as a representative, and him I send without scruple. As to the affair of Milton, I know not what will become of it. I wrote to Johnson a week since to tell him that the interruption of Mrs Unwin's illness still continuing, and being likely to continue, I knew not when I should be able to proceed. The translations, I said, were finished, except the revisal of a part.

God bless your dear little boy and poet! I thank him for exercising his dawning genius upon me, and shall be still happier to thank him in person.

Abbot is painting me so true,
That, trust me, you would stare,
And hardly know, at the first view,
If I were here, or there.

I have sat twice; and the few who have seen his copy of me are much struck with the resemblance. He is a sober, quiet man, which, considering that I must have him at least a week longer for an inmate, is a great comfort to me.*

My Mary sends you her best love. She can walk now, leaning on my arm only, and her speech is certainly much improved. I long to see you. Why cannot you and dear Tom spend the remainder of the summer with us? We might all then set off for Eartham merrily together. But I retract this, conscious that I am unreasonable. It is a wretched world, and what we would, is almost always what we cannot.

Adieu! Love me, and be sure of a return.

W. C.

412.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

PREPARATIONS FOR A VISIT TO EARTHAM.

WESTON, *July* 22, 1792.

THIS important affair, my dear brother, is at last decided, and we are coming. Wednesday se'ennight, if nothing occur

* "How do you imagine I have been employed these ten days? Not in sitting on cockatrice eggs, nor yet to gratify a mere idle humour, nor because I am too sick to nurse; but because my cousin Johnson has an aunt who has a longing desire of my picture, and because he would therefore bring a painter from London to draw it."—Cowper's *Private Correspondence*.

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to make a later day necessary, is the day fixed for our journey. Our rate of travelling must depend on Mary's ability to bear it. Our mode of travelling will occupy three days unavoidably, for we shall come in a coach. Abbot finishes my picture to-morrrw; on Wednesday he returns to town, and is commissioned to order one down for us, with four steeds to draw it;

> ———Hollow pamper'd jades of Asia,
> That cannot go but forty miles a-day.

Send us our route, for I am as ignorant of it almost as if I were in a strange country. We shall reach St Alban's, I suppose, the first day; say where we must finish our second day's journey, and at what inn we may best repose? As to the end of the third day, we know where that will find us, namely, in the arms, and under the roof, of our beloved Hayley.

General Cowper, having heard a rumour of this intended migration, desires to meet me on the road, that we may once more see each other. He lives at Ham, near Kingston. Shall we go through Kingston, or near it? For I would give him as little trouble as possible, though he offers very kindly to come as far as Barnet for that purpose. Nor must I forget Carwardine, who so kindly desired to be informed what way we should go. On what point of the road will it be easiest for him to find us? On all these points you must be my oracle. My friend and brother, we shall overwhelm you with our numbers; this is all the trouble that I have left. My Johnny of Norfolk, happy in the thought of accompanying us, would be broken-hearted to be left behind.

In the midst of all these solicitudes, I laugh to think what they are made of, and what an important thing it is for me to travel. Other men steal away from their homes silently, and make no disturbance; but when I move, houses are turned upside down, maids are turned out of their beds, all the counties through which I pass appear to be in an uproar; Surrey greets me by the mouth of the General, and Essex by that of Carwardine. How strange does all this seem to a man who has seen no bustle, and made none, for twenty years together. Adieu! W. C.

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413. — TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

SAME SUBJECT — COWPER'S UNEASINESS.

WESTON, *July* 29, 1792.

Through floods and flames, to your retreat,
I win my desp'rate way,
And when we meet, if e'er we meet,
Will echo your huzza!

You will wonder at the word *desp'rate* in the second line, and at the *if* in the third; but could you have any conception of the fears I have had to battle with, of the dejection of spirits that I have suffered concerning this journey, you would wonder much more that I still courageously persevere in my resolution to undertake it. Fortunately for my intentions, it happens that as the day approaches my terrors abate; for had they continued to be what they were a week since, I must after all have disappointed you, and was actually once on the verge of doing it. I have told you something of my nocturnal experiences, and assure you now that they were hardly ever more terrific than on this occasion. Prayer has, however, opened my passage at last, and obtained for me a degree of confidence that I trust will prove a comfortable viaticum to me all the way. On Wednesday, therefore, we set forth.

The terrors that I have spoken of would appear ridiculous to most; but to you they will not, for you are a reasonable creature, and know well that to whatever cause it be owing, (whether to constitution, or to God's express appointment,) I am hunted by spiritual hounds in the night season. I cannot help it. You will pity me, and wish it were otherwise; and though you may think there is much of the imaginary in it, will not deem it for that reason an evil less to be lamented. So much for fears and distresses. Soon I hope they shall all have a joyful termination, and I, my Mary, my Johnny, and my dog, be skipping with delight at Eartham!

Well, this picture is at last finished, and well finished, I can assure you. Every creature that has seen it has been astonished at the resemblance. Sam's boy bowed to it, and Beau walked up to it, wagging his tail as he went, and evidently shewing that he acknowledged its likeness to his master. It is a half-length, as it is technically, but absurdly called; that is to say, it gives all but the foot and ankle. To-morrow it goes to town, and will hang some months at Abbot's, when it will be sent to its due destination in Norfolk.

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I hope, or rather wish, that at Eartham I may recover that habit of study, which, inveterate as it once seemed, I now seem to have lost—lost to such a degree that it is even painful to me to think of what it will cost me to acquire it again.

Adieu! my dear, dear Hayley; God give us a happy meeting. Mary sends her love—She is in pretty good plight this morning, having slept well, and for her part, has no fears at all about the journey. Ever yours, W. C.

414.—TO THE REV. MR GREATHEED.*

DESCRIPTION OF EARTHAM.

EARTHAM, *August* 6, 1792.

MY DEAR SIR,—Having first thanked you for your affectionate and acceptable letter, I will proceed, as well as I can, to answer your equally affectionate request, that I would send you early news of our arrival at Eartham. Here we are in the most elegant mansion that I have ever inhabited, and surrounded by the most delightful pleasure grounds that I have ever seen; but which, dissipated as my powers of thought are at present, I will not undertake to describe. It shall suffice me to say, that they occupy three sides of a hill, which in Buckinghamshire might well pass for a mountain, and from the summit of which is beheld a most magnificent landscape bounded by the sea, and in one part by the Isle of Wight, which may also be seen plainly from the window of the library in which I am writing.

It pleased God to carry us both through the journey with far less difficulty and inconvenience than I expected. I began it indeed with a thousand fears, and when we arrived the first evening at Barnet, found myself oppressed in spirit to a degree that could hardly be exceeded. I saw Mrs Unwin weary, as she might well be, and heard such noises, both within the house and without, that I concluded she would get no rest. But I was mercifully disappointed. She rested, though not well, yet sufficiently; and when we finished our next day's journey at Ripley, we were both in better condition, both of body and mind, than on the day preceding. At Ripley we found a quiet inn, that housed, as it happened, that night no company but ourselves. There we slept well, and rose perfectly refreshed. And except some terrors that I felt at

* Dissenting clergyman at Newport-Pagnell.

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passing over the Sussex hills by moonlight, met with little to complain of till we arrived about ten o'clock at Eartham. Here we are as happy as it is in the power of terrestrial good to make us. It is almost a Paradise in which we dwell; and our reception has been the kindest that it was possible for friendship and hospitality to contrive. Our host mentions you with great respect, and bids me tell you that he esteems you highly. Mrs Unwin, who is, I think, in some points, already the better for her excursion, unites with mine her best compliments both to yourself and Mrs Greatheed. I have much to see and enjoy before I can be perfectly apprised of all the delights of Eartham, and will therefore now subscribe myself, yours, my dear sir, with great sincerity, W. C.

415.—TO MRS COURTENAY.*

ACCOUNT OF THE JOURNEY TO EARTHAM.

EARTHAM, *August* 12, 1792.

MY DEAREST CATHARINA,—Though I have travelled far, nothing did I see in my travels that surprised me half so agreeably as your kind letter; for high as my opinion of your good nature is, I had no hopes of hearing from you till I should have written first,—a pleasure which I intended to allow myself the first opportunity.

After three days' confinement in a coach, and suffering as we went all that could be suffered from excessive heat and dust, we found ourselves late in the evening at the door of our friend Hayley. In every other respect the journey was extremely pleasant. At the Mitre in Barnet, where we lodged the first evening, we found our friend Rose, who had walked thither from his house in Chancery Lane to meet us; and at Kingston, where we dined the second day, I found my old and much valued friend General Cowper, whom I had not seen in thirty years, and but for this journey should never have seen again. Mrs Unwin, on whose account I had a thousand fears before we set out, suffered as little from fatigue as myself, and begins, I hope, already to feel some beneficial effects from the air of Eartham, and the exercise that she takes in one of the most delightful pleasure-grounds in the world. They occupy three sides of a hill, lofty enough to command a view of the sea, which skirts the horizon to a length of many

* Formerly Miss Johnson. See note to Letter 394.

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miles, with the Isle of Wight at the end of it. The inland scene is equally beautiful, consisting of a large and deep valley well cultivated, and enclosed by magnificent hills all crowned with wood. I had, for my part, no conception that a poet could be the owner of such a Paradise; and his house is as elegant as his scenes are charming.

But think not, my dear Catharina, that amidst all these beauties I shall lose the remembrance of the peaceful but less splendid Weston. Your precincts will be as dear to me as ever when I return; though when that day will arrive I know not, our host being determined, as I plainly see, to keep us as long as possible. Give my best love to your husband. Thank him most kindly for his attention to the old bard of Greece, and pardon me that I do not send you now an epitaph for Fop. I am not sufficiently recollected to compose even a bagatelle at present; but in due time you shall receive it.

Hayley, who will some time or other, I hope, see you at Weston, is already prepared to love you both, and being passionately fond of music, longs much to hear you.—Adieu!

W. C.

416.—TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

INVITATION TO EARTHAM.

EARTHAM, *August* 14, 1792.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Romney* is here; it would add much to my happiness if you were of the party; I have prepared Hayley to think highly, that is justly of you, and the time I hope will come, when you will supersede all need of my recommendation.

Mrs Unwin gathers strength. I have indeed great hopes from the air and exercise which this fine season affords her opportunity to use, that ere we return she will be herself again.

W. C.

417.—TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

THE SAME SUBJECT.

EARTHAM, *August* 18, 1792.

WISHES in this world are generally vain, and in the next we shall make none. Every day I wish you were of our

* George Romney, R.A. born in Lancashire, 1734, died in London, 1802; an artist of considerable reputation both in portrait and historical painting. His life is well written by Hayley.

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party, knowing how happy you would be in a place where we have nothing to do but enjoy beautiful scenery, and converse agreeably.

Mrs Unwin's health continues to improve; and even I, who was well when I came, find myself still better. Yours,

W. C.

418.—TO MRS COURTENAY.

OCCUPATIONS AT EARTHAM — PORTRAIT BY ROMNEY.

EARTHAM, *August* 25, 1792.

WITHOUT waiting for an answer to my last, I send my dear Catharina the epitaph she desired, composed as well as I could compose it in a place where every object, being still new to me, distracts my attention, and makes me as awkward at verse as if I had never dealt in it. Here it is,—

EPITAPH ON FOP,

A DOG BELONGING TO LADY THROGMORTON.

Though once a puppy, and though Fop by name,
Here moulders one, whose bones some honour claim;
No sycophant, although of spaniel race,
And though no hound, a martyr to the chase.
Ye squirrels, rabbits, leverets, rejoice,
Your haunts no longer echo to his voice.
This record of his fate exulting view,
He died worn out with vain pursuit of you.
"Yes!" the indignant shade of Fop replies,
"And worn with vain pursuit man also dies!"

I am here, as I told you in my last, delightfully situated, and in the enjoyment of all that the most friendly hospitality can impart; yet do I neither forget Weston, nor my friends at Weston; on the contrary, I have at length, though much and kindly pressed to make a longer stay, determined on the day of our departure—on the seventeenth of September we shall leave Eartham; four days will be necessary to bring us home again, for I am under a promise to General Cowper to dine with him on the way, which cannot be done comfortably, either to him or to ourselves, unless we sleep that night at Kingston.

The air of this place has been, I believe, beneficial to us both. I indeed was in tolerable health before I set out, but have acquired since I came both a better appetite, and a knack of sleeping almost as much in a single night as formerly in two. Whether double quantities of that article will be favourable to me as a poet, time must shew. About myself,

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however, I care little, being made of materials so tough, as not to threaten me even now, at the end of so many *lustrums*, with any thing like a speedy dissolution. My chief concern has been about Mrs Unwin, and my chief comfort at this moment is, that she likewise has received, I hope, considerable benefit by the journey.

Tell my dear George that I begin to long to behold him again; and did it not savour of ingratitude to the friend, under whose roof I am so happy at present, should be impatient to find myself once more under yours.

Adieu! my dear Catharina. I have nothing to add in the way of news, except that Romney has drawn me in crayons; by the suffrage of all here, extremely like. W. C.

419. — TO LADY HESKETH.

DEATH OF MISS HURDIS — HIS OWN MELANCHOLY — MRS UNWIN'S HEALTH.

EARTHAM, *August* 26, 1792.

I KNOW not how it is, my dearest Coz, but in a new scene, and surrounded by strange objects, I find my powers of thinking dissipated to a degree that makes it difficult to me even to write a letter, and even a letter to you; but such a letter as I can, I will, and have the fairest chance to succeed this morning, Hayley, Romney, Hayley's son, and Beau, being all gone together to the sea for bathing. The sea, you must know, is nine miles off, so that unless stupidity prevent, I shall have opportunity to write not only to you, but to poor Hurdis also, who is broken-hearted for the loss of his favourite sister, lately dead: and whose letter, giving an account of it, which I received yesterday, drew tears from the eyes of all our party. My only comfort respecting even yourself is, that you write in good spirits, and assure me that you are in a state of recovery; otherwise I should mourn not only for Hurdis, but for myself, lest a certain event should reduce me, and in a short time too, to a situation as distressing as his; for though nature designed you only for my cousin, you have had a sister's place in my affections ever since I knew you. The reason is, I suppose, that having no sister, the daughter of my own mother, I thought it proper to have one, the daughter of yours. Certain it is, that I can by no means afford to lose you; and that unless you will be upon honour with me, to give me always a true account of yourself, at least when we

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are not together, I shall always be unhappy, because always suspicious that you deceive me.

Now for ourselves. I am, without the least dissimulation, in good health; my spirits are about as good as you have ever seen them; and if increase of appetite and a double portion of sleep be advantageous, such are the advantages that I have received from this migration. As to that gloominess of mind, which I have had these twenty years, it cleaves to me even here; and could I be translated to Paradise, unless I left my body behind me, would cleave to me even there also. It is my companion for life, and nothing will ever divorce us. So much for myself. Mrs Unwin is evidently the better for her jaunt, though by no means as she was before this last attack; still wanting help when she would rise from her seat, and a support in walking; but she is able to use more exercise than she could at home, and moves with rather a less tottering step. God knows what he designs for me; but when I see those, who are dearer to me than myself, distempered and enfeebled, and myself as strong as in the days of my youth, I tremble for the solitude in which a few years may place me. I wish her and you to die before me, indeed, but not till I am more likely to follow immediately. Enough of this!

Romney has drawn me in crayons, and in the opinion of all here, with his best hand, and with the most exact resemblance possible.

The seventeenth of September is the day on which I intend to leave Eartham. We shall then have been six weeks resident here; a holiday time long enough for a man who has much to do. And now farewell! W. C.

P. S. Hayley, whose love for me seems to be truly that of a brother, has given me his picture, drawn by Romney about fifteen years ago; an admirable likeness.

420.—TO THE REV. MR HURDIS.

CONSOLATORY ON THE DEATH OF HIS SISTER.

EARTHAM, *August* 26, 1792.

MY DEAR SIR,—Your kind but very affecting letter found me not at Weston, to which place it was directed, but in a bower of my friend Hayley's garden, at Eartham, where I was sitting with Mrs Unwin. We both knew the moment we saw

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it, from whom it came; and observing a red seal, both comforted ourselves that all was well at Burwash: but we soon felt that we were called not to rejoice, but to mourn with you. We do indeed sincerely mourn with you; and if it will afford you any consolation to know it, you may be assured, that every eye here has testified what our hearts have suffered for you. Your loss is great, and your disposition I perceive such as exposes you to feel the whole weight of it. I will not add to your sorrow by a vain attempt to assuage it; your own good sense and the piety of your principles will, of course, suggest to you the most powerful motives of acquiescence in the will of God. You will be sure to recollect that the stroke, severe as it is, is not the stroke of an enemy, but of a Father; and will find I trust hereafter that like a father He has done you good by it. Thousands have been able to say, and myself as loud as any of them, it has been good for me that I was afflicted; but time is necessary to work us to this persuasion, and in due time it shall be yours. Mr Hayley, who tenderly sympathizes with you, has enjoined me to send you as pressing an invitation as I can frame, to join me at this place. I have every motive to wish your consent,—both your benefit and my own, which I believe would be abundantly answered by your coming, ought to make me eloquent in such a cause. Here you will find silence and retirement in perfection, when you would seek them; and here such company as I have no doubt would suit you,—all cheerful, but not noisy; and all alike disposed to love you: you and I seem to have here a fair opportunity of meeting. It were a pity we should be in the same county, and not come together. I am here till the seventeenth of September, an interval that will afford you time to make the necessary arrangements, and to gratify me at last with an interview which I have long desired. Let me hear from you soon, that I may have double pleasure,—the pleasure of expecting, as well as that of seeing you.

Mrs Unwin, I thank God, though still a sufferer by her last illness, is much better, and has received considerable benefit by the air of Eartham. She adds to mine her affectionate compliments, and joins me and Hayley in this invitation.

Mr Romney is here, and a young man, a cousin of mine. I tell you who we are, that you may not be afraid of us.

Adieu! May the Comforter of all the afflicted who seek Him, be yours! God bless you. W. C.

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421.—TO LADY HESKETH.

ATTACHMENT TO WESTON—DEPARTURE FROM EARTHAM, AND ARRANGEMENTS.

EARTHAM, *September* 9, 1792.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—I determine, if possible, to send you one more letter, or at least, if possible, once more to send you something like one, before we leave Eartham. But I am in truth so unaccountably local in the use of my pen, that, like the man in the fable, who could leap well nowhere but at Rhodes, I seem incapable of writing at all except at Weston. This is, as I have already told you, a delightful place; more beautiful scenery I have never beheld nor expect to behold; but the charms of it, uncommon as they are, have not in the least alienated my affections from Weston. The genius of that place suits me better; it has an air of snug concealment, in which a disposition like mine feels peculiarly gratified; whereas here I see from every window woods like forests, and hills like mountains—a wildness, in short, that rather increases my natural melancholy, and which, were it not for the agreeables I find within, would soon convince me that mere change of place can avail me little. Accordingly, I have not looked out for a house in Sussex, nor shall.

The intended day of our departure continues to be the seventeenth. I hope to reconduct Mrs Unwin to the Lodge with her health considerably mended: but it is in the article of speech chiefly, and in her powers of walking, that she is sensible of much improvement. Her sight and her hand still fail her, so that she can neither read nor work; mortifying circumstances both to her, who is never willingly idle.

On the eighteenth I purpose to dine with the General, and to rest that night at Kingston; but the pleasure I shall have in the interview will hardly be greater than the pain I shall feel at the end of it, for we shall part probably to meet no more.

Johnny, I know, has told you that Mr Hurdis is here. Distressed by the loss of his sister, he has renounced the place where she died for ever, and is about to enter on a new course of life at Oxford. You would admire him much. He is gentle in his manners, and delicate in his person, resembling our poor friend Unwin, both in face and figure, more than any one I have ever seen. But he has not, at least he has not at present, his vivacity.

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I have corresponded since I came here with Mrs Courtenay, and had yesterday a very kind letter from her.

Adieu, my dear! may God bless you! Write to me as soon as you can after the twentieth. I shall then be at Weston, and indulging myself in the hope that I shall ere long see you there also. W. C.

422. — TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

HIS JOURNEY HOMEWARDS.

THE SUN, AT KINGSTON, *September*, 18, 1792.

MY DEAR BROTHER, — With no sinister accident to retard or terrify us, we find ourselves, at a quarter before one, arrived safe at Kingston. I left you with a heavy heart, and with a heavy heart took leave of our dear Tom,* at the bottom of the Chalk Hill. But soon after this last separation, my troubles gushed from my eyes, and then I was better.

We must now prepare for our visit to the General. I add no more, therefore, than our dearest remembrances and prayers that God may bless you and yours, and reward you an hundred-fold for all your kindness. Tell Tom I shall always hold him dear for his affectionate attentions to Mrs Unwin. From her heart the memory of him can never be erased. Johnny loves you all, and has his share in all these acknowledgments. — Adieu! W. C.

423. — TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

TERMINATION OF THEIR JOURNEY, AND ARRIVAL AT WESTON.

WESTON, *September* 21, 1792.

MY DEAR HAYLEY, — Chaos himself, even the chaos of Milton, is not surrounded with more confusion, nor has a mind more completely in a hubbub, than I experience at the present moment. At our first arrival, after long absence, we find an hundred orders to servants necessary, a thousand things to be restored to their proper places, and an endless variety of minutiæ to be adjusted, which, though individually of little importance, are most momentous in the aggregate. In these circumstances, I find myself so indisposed to writing, that, save to yourself, I would on no account attempt it; but

* Mr Hayley's son.

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to you I will give such a recital as I can of all that has passed since I sent you that short note from Kingston, knowing that if it be a perplexed recital, you will consider the cause, and pardon it. I will begin with a remark in which I am inclined to think you will agree with me, that there is sometimes more true heroism passing in a corner, and on occasions that make no noise in the world, than has often been exercised by those whom that world esteems her greatest heroes, and on occasions the most illustrious: I hope so at least; for all the heroism I have to boast, and all the opportunities I have of displaying any, are of a private nature. After writing the note, I immediately began to prepare for my appointed visit to Ham; but the struggles that I had with my own spirit, labouring as I did under the most dreadful dejection, are never to be told. I would have given the world to have been excused. I went, however, and carried my point against myself with a heart riven asunder: I have reasons for all this anxiety, which I cannot relate now. The visit, however, passed off well, and we returned in the dark to Kingston. I, with a lighter heart than I had known since my departure from Eartham, and Mary, too, for she had suffered hardly less than myself, and chiefly on my account. That night we rested well in our inn, and at twenty minutes after eight next morning, set off for London; exactly at ten we reached Mr Rose's door; we drank a dish of chocolate with him, and proceeded, Mr Rose riding with us as far as St Alban's. From this time we met with no impediment. In the dark, and in a storm, at eight at night, we found ourselves at our own back door. Mrs Unwin was very near slipping out of the chair in which she was taken from the chaise, but at last was landed safe. We all have had a good night, and are all well this morning. God bless you, my dearest brother. W. C.

424. — TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

COWPER'S DESPONDENCY.

WESTON, *October* 2, 1792.

MY DEAR HAYLEY, — A bad night, succeeded by an east wind, and a sky all in sables, have such an effect on my spirits, that if I did not consult my own comfort more than yours, I should not write to-day, for I shall not entertain you much; yet your letter, though containing no very pleasant tidings, has afforded me some relief. It tells me, indeed, that you

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have been dispirited yourself, and that poor little Tom, the faithful squire of my Mary, has been seriously indisposed: all this grieves me; but then there is a warmth of heart, and a kindness in it, that do me good. I will endeavour not to repay you in notes of sorrow and despondence, though all my sprightly chords seem broken. In truth, one day excepted, I have not seen the day when I have been cheerful, since I left you. My spirits, I think, are almost constantly lower than they were; the approach of winter is perhaps the cause; and if it is, I have nothing better to expect for a long time to come.

Yesterday was a day of assignation with myself, the day of which I said some days before it came, When that day comes I will begin my dissertations. Accordingly, when it came I prepared to do so; filled a letter-case with fresh paper, furnished myself with a pretty good pen, and replenished my ink-bottle; but partly from one cause, and partly from another, chiefly, however, from distress and dejection, after writing and obliterating about six lines, in the composition of which I spent near an hour, I was obliged to relinquish the attempt. An attempt so unsuccessful could have no other effect than to dishearten me, and it has had that effect to such a degree, that I know not when I shall find courage to make another. At present I shall certainly abstain, since at present I cannot well afford to expose myself to the danger of a fresh mortification.

W. C.

425. — TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

MISCELLANEOUS PRIVATE AFFAIRS.

WESTON, *October* 13, 1792.

I BEGAN a letter to you yesterday, my dearest brother, and proceeded through two sides of the sheet; but so much of my nervous fever found its way into it, that, looking it over this morning, I determined not to send it.

I have risen, though not in good spirits, yet in better than I generally do of late, and therefore will not address you in the melancholy tone that belongs to my worst feelings.

I began to be restless about your portrait, and to say, how long shall I have to wait for it? I wished it here for many reasons; the sight of it will be a comfort to me, for I not only love, but am proud of you, as of a conquest made in my old age. Johnny goes to town on Monday, on purpose to call on Romney, to whom he shall give all proper information

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concerning its conveyance hither. The name of a man, whom I esteem as I do Romney, ought not to be unmusical in my ears; but this name will be so till I shall have paid him a debt justly due to him, by doing such poetical honours to it as I intend. Heaven knows when that intention will be executed, for the Muse is still as obdurate and as coy as ever.

Your kind postscript is just arrived, and gives me great pleasure. When I cannot see you myself, it seems some comfort, however, that you have been seen by another known to me; and who will tell me in a few days that he has seen you. Your wishes to disperse my melancholy would, I am sure, prevail, did that event depend on the warmth and sincerity with which you frame them; but it has baffled both wishes and prayers, and those the most fervent that could be made, so many years, that the case seems hopeless. But no more of this at present.

Your verses to Austen are as sweet as the honey that they accompany,—kind, friendly, witty, and elegant. When shall I be able to do the like? perhaps when my Mary, like your Tom, shall cease to be an invalid, I may recover a power at least to do something. I sincerely rejoice in the dear little man's restoration. My Mary continues, I hope, to mend a little. W. C.

426.—TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

THE POET'S INDISPOSITION TO STUDY.

WESTON, *October* 19, 1792.

MY DEAREST JOHNNY,—You are too useful when you are here not to be missed on a hundred occasions daily; and too much domesticated with us not to be regretted always. I hope, therefore, that your month or six weeks will not be, like many I have known, capable of being drawn out into any length whatever, and productive of nothing but disappointment.

I have done nothing since you went, except that I have composed the better half of a sonnet to Romney; yet even this ought to bear an earlier date, for I began to be haunted with a desire to do it long before we came out of Sussex, and have daily attempted it ever since.

It would be well for the reading part of the world, if the writing part were, many of them, as dull as I am. Yet even

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this small produce, which my steril intellect has hardly yielded at last, may serve to convince you that, in point of spirits, I am not worse.

In fact, I am a little better. The powders and the laudanum together have, for the present at least, abated the fever that consumes them; and in measure as the fever abates, I acquire a less discouraging view of things, and with it a little power to exert myself.

In the evenings I read Baker's Chronicle to Mrs Unwin, having no other history, and hope in time to be as well versed in it as his admirer, Sir Roger de Coverley. *

W. C.

427.—TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

ON SITTING FOR HIS PICTURE.

WESTON, *October* 22, 1792.

MY DEAR JOHNNY,— Here am I with I know not how many letters to answer, and no time to do it in. I exhort you, therefore, to set a proper value on this, as proving your priority in my attentions, though, in other respects, likely to be of little value.

You do well to sit for your picture, and give very sufficient reasons for doing it; you will also, I doubt not, take care, that when future generations shall look at it, some spectator or other shall say, This is the picture of a good man, and a useful one.

And now, God bless you, my dear Johnny. I proceed much after the old rate; rising cheerless and distressed in the morning, and brightening a little as the day goes on. Adieu! W. C.

428.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

COWPER'S MILTON INTERRUPTED — SONNET TO ROMNEY.

WESTON, *October* 28, 1792.

NOTHING done, my dearest brother, nor likely to be done at present; yet I purpose in a day or two to make another attempt, to which, however, I shall address myself with fear

* Sir Richard Baker, knighted by James I, wrote his Chronicle of the Kings of England while in the Fleet prison, where he died 1645.

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and trembling, like a man who, having sprained his wrist, dreads to use it. I have not, indeed, like such a man, injured myself by any extraordinary exertion, but seem as much enfeebled as if I had. The consciousness that there is so much to do, and nothing done, is a burden I am not able to bear. Milton especially is my grievance, and I might almost as well be haunted by his ghost, as goaded with continual reproaches for neglecting him. I will therefore begin; I will do my best; and if, after all, that best prove good for nothing, I will even send the notes, worthless as they are, that I have made already,—a measure very disagreeable to myself, and to which nothing but necessity shall compel me. I shall rejoice to see those new samples of your biography, which you give me to expect.

Allons! courage!—Here comes something, however; produced after a gestation as long as that of a pregnant woman. It is the debt long unpaid,—the compliment due to Romney; and if it has your approbation, I will send it, or you may send it for me. I must premise, however, that I intended nothing less than a sonnet when I began. I know not why, but I said to myself, It shall not be a sonnet; accordingly, I attempted it in one sort of measure, then in a second, then in a third, till I had made the trial in half a dozen different kinds of shorter verse, and behold it is a sonnet at last. The fates would have it so:

TO GEORGE ROMNEY, ESQ.

ROMNEY! expert infallibly to trace,
On chart or canvass, not the form alone,
And semblance, but, however faintly shewn,
The mind's impression, too, on every face,
With strokes that time ought never to erase:
Thou hast so pencill'd mine, that, though I own
The subject worthless, I have never known
The artist shining with superior grace.
But this I mark, that symptoms none of woe
In thy incomparable work appear:
Well! I am satisfied it should be so,
Since on maturer thought the cause is clear:
For in my looks what sorrow could'st thou see,
While I was Hayley's guest, and sat to thee!

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429. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

MRS UNWIN'S ILLNESS, AND HIS OWN MELANCHOLY — HIS PICTURE.

WESTON, *November* 9, 1792.

MY DEAR FRIEND,— I wish that I were as industrious and as much occupied as you, though in a different way; but it is not so with me. Mrs Unwin's great debility (who is not yet able to move without assistance) is of itself a hinderance such as would effectually disable me. Till she can work and read, and fill up her time as usual, (all which is at present entirely out of her power,) I may now and then find time to write a letter, but I shall write nothing more. I cannot sit with my pen in my hand, and my books before me, while she is in effect in solitude, silent, and looking at the fire. To this hinderance that other has been added, of which you are already aware, a want of spirits, such as I have never known, when I was not absolutely laid by, since I commenced an author. How long I shall be continued in these uncomfortable circumstances is known only to Him who, as he will, disposes of us all. I may be yet able, perhaps, to prepare the first book of the Paradise Lost for the press, before it will be wanted; and Johnson himself seems to think there will be no haste for the second. But poetry is my favourite employment, and all my poetical operations are, in the meantime, suspended, for while a work to which I have bound myself remains unaccomplished I can do nothing else.

Johnson's plan of prefixing my phiz to the new edition of my Poems is by no means a pleasant one to me, and so I told him in a letter I sent him from Eartham, in which I assured him that my objections to it would not be easily surmounted. But if you judge that it may really have an effect in advancing the sale, I would not be so squeamish as to suffer the spirit of prudery to prevail in me to his disadvantage. Somebody told an author, I forget whom, that there was more vanity in refusing his picture, than in granting it, on which he instantly complied. I do not perfectly feel all the force of the argument, but it shall content me that he did.

I do most sincerely rejoice in the success of your publication, and have no doubt that my prophecy concerning your success in greater matters will be fulfilled.* We are naturally

* This alludes to Mr Rose's edition of Decisions of the English Courts.

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pleased when our friends approve what we approve ourselves; how much, then, must I be pleased, whan you speak so kindly of Johnny! I know him to be all that you think him, and love him entirely.

Adieu! We expect you at Christmas, and shall, therefore, rejoice when Christmas comes. Let nothing interfere. Ever yours, W. C.

430.—TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

MORTUARY VERSES—CONTINUED MELANCHOLY.

WESTON, *November* 20, 1792.

MY DEAREST JOHNNY,—I give you many thanks for your rhymes, and your verses without rhyme; for your poetical dialogue between wood and stone; between Homer's head and the head of Samuel; kindly intended, I know well, for my amusement, and that amused me much.

The successor of the clerk defunct, for whom I used to write mortuary verses, arrived here this morning, with a recommendatory letter from Joe Rye, and an humble petition of his own, entreating me to assist him as I had assisted his predecessor. I have undertaken the service, although with no little reluctance, being involved in many arrears on other subjects, and having very little dependence at present on my ability to write at all. I proceed exactly as when you were here,—a letter now and then before breakfast, and the rest of my time all holiday; if holiday it may be called, that is spent chiefly in moping and musing, and *"forecasting the fashion of uncertain evils."*

The fever on my spirits has harassed me much, and I have never had so good a night, nor so quiet a rising, since you went, as on this very morning,—a relief that I account particularly seasonable and propitious, because I had, in my intentions, devoted this morning to you, and could not have fulfilled those intentions, had I been as spiritless as I generally am.

I am glad that Johnson is in no haste for Milton, for I seem myself not likely to address myself presently to that concern, with any prospect of success; yet something, now and then, like a secret whisper, assures and encourages me that it will yet be done. W. C.

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431. — TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

MILTON — MORTUARY VERSES.

WESTON, *November* 25, 1792.

How shall I thank you enough for the interest you take in my future Miltonic labours, and the assistance you promise me in the performance of them? I will some time or other, if I live, and live a poet, acknowledge your friendship in some of my best verse, the most suitable return one poet can make to another; in the mean time, I love you, and am sensible of all your kindness. You wish me warm in my work, and I ardently wish the same; but when I shall be so, God only knows. My melancholy, which seemed a little alleviated for a few days, has gathered about me again, with as black a cloud as ever; the consequence is absolute incapacity to begin.

I was for some years dirge writer to the town of Northampton, being employed by the clerk of the principal parish there, to furnish him with an annual copy of verses, proper to be printed at the foot of his bill of mortality; but the clerk died, and hearing nothing for two years from his successor, I well hoped that I was out of my office. The other morning, however, Sam announced the new clerk; he came to solicit the same service as I had rendered his predecessor, and I reluctantly complied; doubtful, indeed, whether I was capable. I have, however, achieved that labour, and I have done nothing more. I am just sent for up to Mary, dear Mary! Adieu! she is as well as when I left you, I would I could say better. Remember us both affectionately to your sweet boy, and trust me for being most truly yours, W. C.

432. — TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

THOUGHTS ON A REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT.

WESTON, *December* 16, 1792.

MY DEAR SIR, — We differ so little, that it is pity we should not agree. The possibility of restoring our diseased government is, I think, the only point on which we are not of one mind. If you are right, and it cannot be touched in the medical way, without danger of absolute ruin to the constitution, keep the doctors at a distance, say I — and let us live as long as we can. But perhaps physicians might be found of skill sufficient for the purpose, were they but as willing as able.

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Who are they? Not those honest blunderers the mob, but our governors themselves. As it is in the power of any individual to be honest if he will, any body of men are, as it seems to me, equally possessed of the same option. For I can never persuade myself to think the world so constituted by the Author of it, and human society, which is His ordinance, so shabby a business, that the buying and selling of votes and consciences should be essential to its existence. As to multiplied representation, I know not that I foresee any great advantage likely to arise from that. Provided there be but a reasonable number of reasonable heads laid together for the good of the nation, the end may as well be answered by five hundred, as it would be by a thousand, and perhaps better. But then they should be honest as well as wise; and in order that they may be so, they should put it out of their own power to be otherwise. This they might certainly do, if they would; and would they do it, I am not convinced that any great mischief would ensue. You say, "Somebody must have influence," but I see no necessity for it. Let integrity of intention and a due share of ability be supposed, and the influence will be in the right place, it will all centre in the zeal and good of the nation. That will influence their debates and decisions, and nothing else ought to do it. You will say, perhaps, that — wise men and honest men as they are supposed — they are yet liable to be split into almost as many differences of opinion as there are individuals: but I rather think not. It is observed of Prince Eugene and the Duke of Marlborough,* that each always approved and seconded the plans and views of the other; and the reason given for it is, that they were men of equal ability. The same cause that could make two unanimous, would make twenty so; and would at least secure a majority among as many hundreds. As to the reformation of the church, I want none, unless by a better provision for the inferior clergy: and if that could be brought about by emaciating a little some of our too corpulent dignitaries, I should be well contented.

The dissenters, I think, catholics and others, have all a right to the privileges of all other Englishmen, because to deprive them is persecution; and persecution on any account, but especially on a religious one, is an abomination. But after all, *valeat respublica*, I love my country, I love my king, and I wish peace and prosperity to Old England. — Adieu.

W. C.

* Prince Eugene, born in 1663, died 1736. John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, born at St Ashe in Devonshire, 1650, died 1722.

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433.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

REGRETTING THE IMPRACTICABILITY OF STUDY.

WESTON, *December* 26, 1792.

THAT I may not be silent till my silence alarms you, I snatch a moment to tell you that although *toujours triste* I am not worse than usual, but my opportunities of writing are *paucified*, as perhaps Dr Johnson would have dared to say, and the few that I have are shortened by company.

Give my love to dear Tom, and thank him for his very apposite extract, which I should be happy indeed to turn to any account. How often do I wish, in the course of every day, that I could be employed once more in poetry, and how often of course that this Miltonic trap had never caught me! The year ninety-two shall stand chronicled in my remembrance as the most melancholy that I have ever known, except the few weeks that I spent at Eartham, and such it has been principally, because being engaged to Milton, I felt myself no longer free for any other engagement. That ill-fated work, impracticable in itself, has made every thing else impracticable.

* * * I am very *Pindaric*,* and obliged to be so by the hurry of the hour. My friends are come down to breakfast.—Adieu. W. C.

434.—TO THE REV. MR HURDIS.

EFFECTS OF AFFLICTION—DOUBTS OF FINISHING MILTON.

WESTON, *January* 6, 1793.

MY DEAR SIR,—I seize a passing moment merely to say that I feel for your distresses, and sincerely pity you; and I shall be happy to learn from your next, that your sister's amendment has superseded the necessity you feared of a journey to London. Your candid account of the effect that your afflictions have both on your spirits and temper I can perfectly understand, having laboured much in that fire myself, and perhaps more than any man. It is in such a school, however, that we must learn, if we ever truly learn it, the natural depravity of the human heart, and of our own in

* That is, changing abruptly from subject to subject.

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particular, together with the consequence that necessarily follows such wretched premises — our indispensable need of the atonement, and our inexpressible obligations to Him who made it. This reflection cannot escape a thinking mind, looking back on those ebullitions of fretfulness and impatience to which it has yielded in a season of great affliction.

Having lately had company who left us only on the fourth, I have done nothing indeed, since my return from Sussex, except a trifle or two, which it was incumbent upon me to write. Milton hangs in doubt; neither spirits nor opportunity suffice me for that labour. I regret continually that I ever suffered myself to be persuaded to undertake it. The most that I hope to effect is a complete revisal of my own Homer. Johnson told my friend, who has just left me, that it will begin to be reviewed in the next Analytical, and that he *hoped* the review of it would not offend me. By this I understand that if I am not offended, it will be owing more to my own equanimity, than to the mildness of the critic. So be it! He will put an opportunity of victory over myself into my hands, and I will endeavour not to lose it! Adieu!

W. C.

435. — TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

ARRIVAL OF HIS PICTURE AT WESTON.

WESTON, *January* 20, 1793.

MY DEAR BROTHER, — Now that I know that you are safe, I treat you, as you see, with a philosophical indifference, not acknowledging your kind and immediate answer to anxious inquiries, till it suits my own convenience. I have learned, however, from my late solicitude, that not only you, but yours, interest me to a degree that, should any thing happen to either of you, would be very inconsistent with my peace. Sometimes I thought that you were extremely ill, and, once or twice, that you were dead. As often some tragedy reached my ear concerning little Tom. "*O, vanæ mentes hominum!*" How liable are we to a thousand impositions, and how indebted to honest old Time, who never fails to undeceive us! Whatever you had in prospect you acted kindly by me not to make me partaker of your expectations; for I have a spirit, if not so sanguine as yours, yet that would have waited for your coming with anxious impatience, and have been dismally mortified by the disappointment. Had you come, and come without notice

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too, you would not have surprised us more, than (as the matter was managed) we were surprised at the arrival of your picture. It reached us in the evening, after the shutters were closed, at a time when a chaise might actually have brought you without giving us the least previous intimation. Then it was that Samuel, with his cheerful countenance, appeared at the study door, and, with a voice as cheerful as his looks, exclaimed, "Mr Hayley is come, Madam!" We both started, and in the same moment cried, "Mr Hayley come! and where is he?" The next moment corrected our mistake, and finding Mary's voice grow suddenly tremulous, I turned and saw her weeping.

I do nothing, notwithstanding all your exhortations: my idleness is proof against them all, or, to speak more truly, my difficulties are so. Something indeed I do. I play at pushpin with Homer every morning before breakfast, fingering and polishing, as Paris did his armour. I have lately had a letter from Dublin on that subject which has pleased me.

W. C.

436.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

ON THE DEATH OF DR AUSTEN.

WESTON, *January* 29, 1793.

MY DEAREST HAYLEY,—I truly sympathize with you under your weight of sorrow for the loss of our good Samaritan. But be not broken hearted, my friend! Remember, the loss of those we love is the condition on which we live ourselves; and that he who chooses his friends wisely from among the excellent of the earth, has a sure ground to hope concerning them when they die, that a merciful God has made them far happier than they could be here, and that we shall join them soon again. This is solid comfort, could we but avail ourselves of it; but I confess the difficulty of doing so. Sorrow is like the deaf adder, "that hears not the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely;" and I feel so much myself for the death of Austen, that my own chief consolation is, that I had never seen him. Live yourself, I beseech you, for I have seen so much of you, that I can by no means spare you, and I will live as long as it shall please God to permit. I know you set some value on me, therefore let that promise comfort you, and give us not reason to say, like David's

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servants, "We know that it would have pleased thee more if all we had died, than this one, for whom thou art inconsolable." You have still Romney, and Carwardine, and Guy, and me, my poor Mary, and I know not how many beside; as many, I suppose, as ever had an opportunity of spending a day with you. He who has the most friends, must necessarily lose the most, and he whose friends are numerous as yours, may the better spare a part of them. It is a changing transient scene; yet a little while, and this poor dream of life will be over with all of us. The living, and they who live unhappy, they are indeed subjects of sorrow. Adieu! my beloved friend, ever yours, W. C.

437. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

CORRECTIONS OF HOMER.

WESTON, *February* 5, 1793.

IN this last revisal of my work (the Homer) I have made a number of small improvements, and am now more convinced than ever, having exercised a cooler judgment upon it than before I could, that the translation will make its way. There must be time for the conquest of vehement and long-rooted prejudice; but without much self-partiality, I believe that the conquest will be made; and am certain that I should be of the same opinion, were the work another man's. I shall soon have finished the Odyssey, and when I have, will send the corrected copy of both to Johnson. Adieu! W. C.

438. — TO LADY HESKETH.

HIS MELANCHOLY — MRS ROSE.

February 10, 1793.

My pens are all split, and my ink glass is dry;
Neither wit, common sense, nor ideas have I.

IN vain has it been that I have made several attempts to write, since I came from Sussex; unless more comfortable days arrive, than I have confidence to look for, there is an end of all writing with me. I have no spirits: when Rose came, I was obliged to prepare for his coming by a nightly dose of laudanum — twelve drops suffice; but without them, I am devoured by melancholy.

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Apropos of the Rose! His wife in her political notions, is the exact counterpart of yourself—loyal in the extreme. Therefore, if you find her thus inclined, when you become acquainted with her, you must not place her resemblance of yourself to the account of her admiration of you, for she is your likeness ready made. In fact, we are all of one mind about government matters; and, notwithstanding your opinion, the Rose is himself a Whig, and I am a Whig, and you, my dear, are a Tory, and all the Tories now-a-day call all the Whigs Republicans. How the deuce you came to be a Tory, is best known to yourself; you have to answer for this novelty to the shades of your ancestors, who were always Whigs ever since we had any. Adieu! W. C.

439.—TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

ON A CRITIQUE ON HOMER.

February 17, 1793.

My dear Friend,—I have read the critique of my work in the Analytical Review, and am happy to have fallen into the hands of a critic, rigorous enough indeed, but a scholar, and a man of sense, and who does not deliberately intend me mischief. I am better pleased indeed that he censures some things, than I should have been with unmixed commendation, for his censure (to use the new diplomatic term) will accredit his praises. In his particular remarks he is for the most part right, and I shall be the better for them; but in his general ones I think he asserts too largely, and more than he could prove. With respect to inversions in particular, I know that they do not abound. Once they did, and I had Milton's example for it, not disapproved by Addison. But on ———'s remonstrance against them, I expunged the most, and in my new edition shall have fewer still. I know that they give dignity, and am sorry to part with them, but, to parody an old proverb, he who lives in the year ninety-three, must do as in the year ninety-three is done by others. The same remark I have to make on his censure of inharmonious lines. I know them to be much fewer than he asserts, and not more in number than I accounted indispensably necessary to a due variation of cadence. I have, however, now, in conformity with modern taste, (overmuch delicate in my mind,) given to a far greater number of them a flow as smooth as oil. A few I retain, and will, in compliment to my own judgment. He

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thinks me too faithful to compound epithets in the introductory lines, and I know his reason. He fears lest the English reader should blame Homer, whom he idolizes, though hardly more than I, for such constant repetition. But them I shall not alter. They are necessary to a just representation of the original. In the affair of Outis,* I shall throw him flat on his back by an unanswerable argument, which I shall give in a note, and with which I am furnished by Mrs Unwin. So much for hypercriticism, which has run away with all my paper. This critic by the way is ———,† I know him by infallible indications. W. C.

440.—TO THE REV. MR HURDIS.

ANECDOTES IN NATURAL HISTORY.

WESTON, *February* 23, 1793.

MY DEAR SIR,—My eyes, which have long been inflamed, will hardly serve me for Homer, and oblige me to make all my letters short. You have obliged me much by sending me so speedily the remainder of your notes. I have begun with them again, and find them, as before, very much to the purpose. More to the purpose they could not have been, had you been poetry professor already. I rejoice sincerely in the prospect you have of that office, which, whatever may be your own thoughts of the matter, I am sure you will fill with great sufficiency. Would that my interest and power to serve you were greater! One string to my bow I have, and one only, which shall not be idle for want of my exertions. I thank you likewise for your very entertaining notices and remarks in the natural way. The hurry in which I write would not suffer me to send you many in return, had I many to send, but only two or three present themselves.

Frogs will feed on worms. I saw a frog gathering into his

* *Outis-Noman*, the name assumed by Ulysses in the adventure with the Cyclops, Odys. ix. In a long note, Cowper defends his retaining the original appellation without translation, referring to the practice of the translators of the Bible, who retain the original Hebrew of proper names, even when these are general in their signification, and employed as significant of some quality. This we suppose to be the argument furnished by Mrs Unwin. *Nabal*, folly; *Naomi*, pleasant; *Mara*, bitter; are the examples quoted. We agree with the critic, however, that *Outis* ought to have been rendered, because it could have been given with equal idiomatic force.

† Dr Matys.

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gullet an earth-worm as long as himself; it cost him time and labour, but at last he succeeded.

Mrs Unwin and I, crossing a brook, saw from the foot-bridge somewhat at the bottom of the water which had the appearance of a flower. Observing it attentively, we found that it consisted of a circular assemblage of minnows; their heads all met in a centre, and their tails diverging at equal distances, and being elevated above their heads, gave them the appearance of a flower half blown. One was longer than the rest; and as often as a straggler came in sight, he quitted his place to pursue him, and having driven him away, he returned to it again, no other minnow offering to take it in his absence. This we saw him do several times. The object that had attached them all was a dead minnow, which they seemed to be devouring.

After a very rainy day, I saw on one of the flower borders what seemed a long hair, but it had a waving, twining motion. Considering more nearly, I found it alive, and endued with spontaneity, but could not discover at the ends of it either head or tail, or any distinction of parts. I carried it into the house, when the air of a warm room dried and killed it presently. W. C.

441.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

SORE EYES — DREAM OF MILTON.

WESTON, *February* 24, 1793.

YOUR letter (so full of kindness, and so exactly in unison with my own feelings for you) should have had, as it deserved to have, an earlier answer, had I not been perpetually tormented with inflamed eyes, which are a sad hinderance to me in every thing. But to make amends, if I do not send you an early answer, I send you at least a speedy one, being obliged to write as fast as my pen can trot, that I may shorten the time of poring upon paper as much as possible. Homer, too, has been another hinderance, for always when I can see, which is only about two hours every morning, and not at all by candle-light, I devote myself to him, being in haste to send him a second time to the press, that nothing may stand in the way of Milton. By the way, where are my dear Tom's remarks, which I long to have, and must have soon, or they will come too late?

Oh! you rogue! what would you give to have such a

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dream about Milton, as I had about a week since? I dreamed that, being in a house in the city, and with much company, looking towards the lower end of the room from the upper end of it, I descried a figure which I immediately knew to be Milton's. He was very gravely, but very neatly, attired in the fashion of his day, and had a countenance which filled me with those feelings that an affectionate child has for a beloved father, such, for instance, as Tom has for you. My first thought was wonder, where he could have been concealed so many years; my second, a transport of joy to find him still alive; my third, another transport to find myself in his company; and my fourth, a resolution to accost him. I did so, and he received me with a complacence, in which I saw equal sweetness and dignity. I spoke of his Paradise Lost, as every man must, who is worthy to speak of it at all, and told him a long story of the manner in which it affected me, when I first discovered it, being at that time a schoolboy. He answered me by a smile, and a gentle inclination of his head. He then grasped my hand affectionately, and with a smile that charmed me, said, "Well, you, for your part, will do well also;" at last, recollecting his great age, (for I understood him to be two hundred years old,) I feared that I might fatigue him by much talking, I took my leave, and he took his, with an air of the most perfect good breeding. His person, his features, his manner, were all so perfectly characteristic, that I am persuaded an apparition of him could not represent him more completely. This may be said to have been one of the dreams of Pindus, may it not?

How truly I rejoice that you have recovered Guy; that man won my heart the moment I saw him; give my love to him, and tell him I am truly glad he is alive again.

There is much sweetness in those lines from the sonneteer of Avon, and not a little in dear Tom's,—an earnest, I trust, of good things to come.

With Mary's kind love, I must now conclude myself, my dear brother, ever yours, LIPPUS.*

* Blear-eyed; a name sometimes assumed by Horace.

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442. — TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

INDISPOSITION.

WESTON, *March* 4, 1793.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — Since I received your last I have been much indisposed, very blind, and very busy. But I have not suffered all these evils at one and the same time. While the winter lasted, I was miserable with a fever on my spirits; when the spring began to approach, I was seized with an inflammation in my eyes; and ever since I have been able to use them, have been employed in giving more last touches to Homer, who is on the point of going to the press again.

Though you are Tory, I believe, and I am Whig, our sentiments concerning the madcaps of France are much the same. They are a terrible race, and I have a horror both of them and their principles. Tacitus is certainly living now, and the quotations you sent me can be nothing but extracts from some letters of his to yourself. Yours most sincerely,

W. C

443.—TO MASTER THOMAS HAYLEY.

OBSERVATIONS ON REMARKS UPON THE VERSION OF HOMER.

WESTON, *March* 14, 1793.

MY DEAR LITTLE CRITIC, — I thank you heartily for your observations, on which I set a higher value, because they have instructed me as much, and have entertained me more, than all the other strictures of our public judges in these matters. Perhaps I am not much more pleased with *shameless wolf*, &c. than you. But what is to be done, my little man? Coarse as the expressions are, they are no more than equivalent to those of Homer. The invective of the ancients was never tempered with good manners, as your papa can tell you; and my business, you know, is, not to be more polite than my author, but to represent him as closely as I can.

Dishonour'd foul I have wiped away, for the reason you give, which is a very just one, and the present reading is this:

> Who had dared dishonour thus
> The life itself, &c.

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Your objection to *kindler of the fires of Heaven*, I had the good fortune to anticipate, and expunged the dirty ambiguity some time since, wondering not a little that I had ever admitted it.

The fault you find with the two first verses of Nestor's speech discovers such a degree of just discernment, that but for your papa's assurance to the contrary, I must have suspected *him* as the author of that remark: much as I should have respected it, if it had been so, I value it, I assure you, my little friend, still more as yours. In the new edition the passage will be found thus altered:

> Alas! great sorrow falls on Greece to-day,
> Priam, and Priam's sons, with all in Troy—
> Oh! how will they exult, and in their hearts
> Triumph, once hearing of this broil between
> The prime of Greece, in council, and in arms.

Where the word *reel* suggests to you the idea of a drunken mountain, it performs the service to which I destined it. It is a bold metaphor; but justified by one of the sublimest passages in Scripture, compared with the sublimity of which even that of Homer suffers humiliation.

It is God himself, who, speaking, I think, by the prophet Isaiah, says,—

> The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard.

With equal boldness in the same Scripture, the poetry of which was never equalled, mountains are said to skip, to break out into singing, and the fields to clap their hands. I intend, therefore, that my Olympus shall be still tipsy.

The accuracy of your last remark, in which you convicted me of a bull, delights me. A fig for all critics but you! The blockheads could not find it. It shall stand thus:

> First spake Polydamas———

Homer was more upon his guard than to commit such a blunder; for he says,—

> ἦρχ' ἀγορεύειν.

And now, my dear little censor, once more accept my thanks. I only regret that your strictures are so few, being just and sensible as they are.

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Tell your papa that he shall hear from me soon; accept mine, and my dear invalid's affectionate remembrances. Ever yours,* W. C

444.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

PROGRESS OF HIS LABOURS—INVITATION TO WESTON.

WESTON, *March* 19, 1793.

MY DEAR HAYLEY,—I am so busy every morning before breakfast, (my only opportunity,) strutting and stalking in Homeric stilts, that you ought to account it an instance of marvellous grace and favour, that I condescend to write even to you. Sometimes I am seriously almost crazed with the multiplicity of the matters before me, and the little or no time that I have for them; and sometimes I repose myself after

* The above letter, which exhibits so pleasing an instance of Cowper's benevolent attention to the improvement of a boy whom he loved to encourage in classical study, will be better understood by here subjoining Master Hayley's epistle, to which it was an answer.

Young Hayley was only twelve years old at the date of his letter.

TO WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.

EARTHAM, *March* 4, 1793.

HONOURED KING OF BARDS!—Since you deign to demand the observations of an humble and inexperienced servant of yours, on a work of one who is so much his superior, (as he is ever ready to serve you with all his might,) behold what you demand! But let me desire you not to censure me for my unskilful, and perhaps (as they will undoubtedly appear to you) ridiculous observations; but be so kind as to receive them as a mark of respectful attention from your obedient servant,

THOMAS HAYLEY.

Here follow the remarks:

Book I, line 184.—I cannot reconcile myself to these expressions: "Ah, clothed with impudence," and "shameless wolf," and "face of flint."

Book I, line 508.—"Dishonour'd foul" is, in my opinion, an uncleanly expression.

Book I, line 651.—"Reel'd," I think, makes it appear as if Olympus was drunk.

Book I, line 749.—"Kindler of the fires of Heaven," I think, makes Jupiter appear too much like a lamp-lighter.

Book II, line 317 to 319.—These lines are, in my opinion, below the elevated genius of Mr Cowper.

Book XVIII, line 300 to 304.—This appears rather Irish, since, in line 300, you say, "No one sat," and, in 304, "Polydamas rose."

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the fatigue of that distraction on the pillow of despair; a pillow which has often served me in time of need, and is become by frequent use, if not very comfortable, at least convenient! So reposed, I laugh at the world, and say, "Yes, you may gape and expect both Homer and Milton from me, but I'll be hanged if ever you get them."

In Homer you must know I am advanced as far as the fifteenth book of the Iliad, leaving nothing behind me that can reasonably offend the most fastidious; and I design him for public appearance in his new dress as soon as possible, for a reason which any poet may guess, if he will but thrust his hand into his pocket.

You forbid me to tantalize you with an invitation to Weston, and yet invite me to Eartham!—No, no! there is no such happiness in store for me at present. Had I rambled at all, I was under promise to all my dear mother's kindred to go to Norfolk, and they are dying to see me; but I have told them, that die they must, for I cannot go; and ergo, as you will perceive, can go nowhere else.

Thanks for Mazarine's epitaph!* it is full of witty paradox, and is written with a force and severity which sufficiently bespeak the author. I account it an inestimable curiosity, and shall be happy when time shall serve, with your aid, to make a good translation of it. But that will be a stubborn business. Adieu! The clock strikes eight; and now for Homer.

W. C.

445.—TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

ARRANGEMENTS WITH HIS PRINTER—NEW EDITION OF HOMER.

WESTON, *March* 27, 1793.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I must send you a line of congratulation on the event of your transaction with Johnson, since you I know partake with me in the pleasure I receive from it. Few of my concerns have been so happily concluded. I am now satisfied with my bookseller, as I have substantial cause to be, and account myself in good hands; a circumstance as pleasant to me as any other part of my business; for I love dearly to be able to confide with all my heart in those with

* Cardinal Julius Mazarine, born at Piscina in the kingdom of Naples, 1602, succeeded Richelieu as Prime Minister of France, and died in 1661. The epitaph is referred to, but not translated in the notes to Cowper's Milton.

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whom I am connected, of what kind soever the connection may be.*

The question of printing or not printing the alterations, seems difficult to decide. If they are not printed, I shall, perhaps, disoblige some purchasers of the first edition; and if they are, many others of them, perhaps a great majority, will never care about them. As far as I have gone I have made a fair copy, and when I have finished the whole, will send them to Johnson, together with the interleaved volumes. He will see in a few minutes what it will be best to do, and by his judgment I shall be determined. The opinion to which I most incline is, that they ought to be printed separately, for they are many of them rather long, here and there a whole speech, or a whole simile, and the verbal and lineal variations are so numerous, that altogether, I apprehend, they will give a new air to the work, and I hope a much improved one.

I forgot to say in the proper place, that some notes, although but very few, I have added already, and may, perhaps, see here and there opportunity for a few more. But notes being little wanted, especially by people at all conversant with classical literature, as most readers of Homer are, I am persuaded that, were they numerous, they would be deemed an encumbrance. I shall write to Johnson soon, perhaps to-morrow, and then shall say the same thing to him.

In point of health we continue much the same. Our united love, and many thanks for your prosperous negotiations, attend yourself and whole family, and especially my little namesake. Adieu, W. C.

446. — TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

PRIDE OF ANCESTRY — VALUE OF RELIGION.

THE LODGE, *April* 11, 1793.

MY DEAREST JOHNNY,—The long muster-roll of my great and small ancestors I signed, and dated, and sent up to Mr Bluemantle, on Monday, according to your desire. Such a pompous affair, drawn out for my sake, reminds me of the old fable of the mountain in parturition, and a mouse the produce. Rest undisturbed, say I, their lordly, ducal, and royal dust!

* The resources thus obtained must have been especially welcome at this time; as we learn, from a private letter to Mr Hill, dated two days later, that Cowper's private fortune was now almost expended.

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Had they left me something handsome, I should have respected them more. But perhaps they did not know that such a one as I should have the honour to be numbered among their descendants. Well! I have a little bookseller that makes me some amends for their deficiency. He has made me a present; an act of liberality which I take every opportunity to blazon, as it well deserves. But you I suppose have learned it already from Mr Rose.

Fear not, my man. You will acquit yourself very well, I dare say, both in standing for your degree, and when you have gained it. A little tremour, and a little shamefacedness in a stripling, like you, are recommendations rather than otherwise; and so they ought to be, being symptoms of an ingenuous mind rather unfrequent in this age of brass.

What you say of your determined purpose, with God's help, to take up the Cross, and despise the shame, gives us both real pleasure. In our pedigree is found one at least who did it before you. Do you the like; and you will meet him in Heaven, as sure as the Scripture is the Word of God.

The quarrel that the world has with evangelic men and doctrines, they would have with a host of angels in the human form. For it is the quarrel of owls with sunshine; of ignorance with divine illumination.

Adieu, my dear Johnny! We shall expect you with earnest desire of your coming, and receive you with much delight.

W. C.

447. — TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

EXCUSE FOR NOT WRITING NOTES FOR HOMER.

WESTON, *April* 23, 1793.

MY DEAR FRIEND AND BROTHER, — Better late than never, and better a little than none at all! Had I been at liberty to consult my inclinations, I would have answered your truly kind and affectionate letter immediately. But I am the busiest man alive; and when this epistle is despatched, you will be the only one of my correspondents to whom I shall not be indebted. While I write this, my poor Mary sits mute; which I cannot well bear, and which, together with want of time to write much, will have a curtailing effect on my epistle.

My only studying time is still given to Homer, not to correction and amendment of him, (for that is all over,) but to writing notes. Johnson has expressed a wish for some,

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that the unlearned may be a little illuminated concerning classical story and the mythology of the ancients; and his behaviour to me has been so liberal, that I can refuse him nothing. Poking into the old Greek commentators blinds me. But it is no matter. I am the more like Homer. — Ever yours, my dearest Hayley, W. C.

448. — TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

ON THE DEATH OF HIS BROTHER.

WESTON, *May* 4, 1793.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — While your sorrow for our common loss was fresh in your mind, I would not write, lest a letter on so distressing a subject should be too painful both to you and me; and now that I seem to have reached a proper time for doing it, the multiplicity of my literary business will hardly afford me leisure. Both you and I have this comfort when deprived of those we love: at our time of life we have every reason to believe that the deprivation cannot be long. Our sun is setting too; and when the hour of rest arrives we shall rejoin your brother, and many whom we have tenderly loved, our forerunners into a better country.

I will say no more on a theme which it will be better perhaps to treat with brevity; and because the introduction of any other might seem a transition too violent, I will only add, that Mrs Unwin and I are about as well as we at any time have been within the last year. — Truly yours, W. C.

449. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

NOTES ON HOMER.

May 5, 1793.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — My delay to answer your last kind letter, to which likewise you desired a speedy reply, must have seemed rather difficult to explain on any other supposition than that of illness, but illness has not been the cause, although, to say the truth, I cannot boast of having been lately very well. Yet has not this been the cause of my silence, but your own advice, very proper, and earnestly given to me, to proceed in the revisal of Homer. To this it is owing that instead of giving an hour or two before breakfast to my correspondence, I allot that time entirely to my

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studies. I have nearly given the last touches to the poetry, and am now busied far more laboriously in writing notes at the request of my honest bookseller, transmitted to me in the first instance by you, and afterwards repeated by himself. I am therefore deep in the old Scholia, and have advanced to the latter part of Iliad nine, explaining, as I go, such passages as may be difficult to unlearned readers, and such only; for notes of that kind are the notes that Johnson desired. I find it a more laborious task than the translation was, and shall be heartily glad when it is over. In the meantime all the letters I receive remain unanswered, or if they receive an answer, it is always a short one. Such this must be. Johnny is here, having flown over London.

Homer, I believe, will make a much more respectable appearance than before. Johnson now thinks it will be right to make a separate impression of the amendments. W. C.

I breakfast every morning on seven or eight pages of the Greek commentators. For so much I am obliged to read in order to select perhaps three or four short notes for the readers of my translation.

Homer is indeed a tie upon me that must not on any account be broken, till all his demands are satisfied; though I have fancied, while the revisal of the Odyssey was at a distance, that it would ask less labour in the finishing, it is not unlikely that, when I take it actually in hand, I may find myself mistaken. Of this at least I am sure, that uneven verse abounds much more in it than it once did in the Iliad, yet to the latter the critics objected on that account, though to the former never; perhaps because they had not read it. Hereafter they shall not quarrel with me on that score. The Iliad is now all smooth turnpike, and I will take equal care that there shall be no jolts in the Odyssey.

490. — TO LADY HESKETH.

DEFINITION OF WHIG AND TORY.

THE LODGE, *May* 7, 1793.

MY DEAREST COZ, — You have thought me long silent, and so have many others. In fact I have not for many months written punctually to any but yourself and Hayley. My time, the little I have, is so engrossed by Homer, that I have at this moment a bundle of unanswered letters by me, and

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letters likely to be so. Thou knowest, I dare say, what it is to have a head weary with thinking. Mine is so fatigued by breakfast time, three days out of four, I am utterly incapable of sitting down to my desk again for any purpose whatever.

I am glad I have convinced thee at last, that thou art a Tory. Your friend's definition of Whig and Tory may be just, for aught I know, as far as the latter are concerned; but respecting the former, I think him mistaken. There is no TRUE Whig who wishes all power in the hands of his own party. The division of it, which the lawyers call tripartite, is exactly what he desires; and he would have neither king, lords, nor commons unequally trusted, or in the smallest degree predominant. Such a Whig am I, and such Whigs are the true friends of the constitution.—Adieu! my dear—I am dead with weariness. W. C.

451.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

COWPER'S TIME OF STUDY — NOTES TO HOMER.

May 21, 1793.

MY DEAR BROTHER,—You must either think me extremely idle, or extremely busy, that I have made your last very kind letter wait so very long for an answer. The truth, however, is that I am neither; but have had time enough to have scribbled to you, had I been able to scribble at all. To explain this riddle I must give you a short account of my proceedings.

I rise at six every morning, and fag till near eleven, when I breakfast. The consequence is, that I am so exhausted as not to be able to write, when the opportunity offers. You will say—"Breakfast before you work, and then your work will not fatigue you." I answer—"Perhaps I might, and your counsel would probably prove beneficial; but I cannot spare a moment for eating in the early part of the morning, having no other time for study." This uneasiness of which I complain is a proof that I am somewhat stricken in years; and there is no other cause by which I can account for it, since I go early to bed, always between ten and eleven, and seldom fail to sleep well. Certain it is, ten years ago I could have done as much, and sixteen years ago did actually much more, without suffering fatigue, or any inconvenience from my labours. How insensibly old age steals on, and how often is it actually arrived before we suspect it! Accident

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alone, some occurrence that suggests a comparison of our former with our present selves, affords the discovery. Well! it is always good to be undeceived, especially on an article of such importance.

There has been a book lately published, entitled, *Man as he is.** I have heard a high character of it, as admirably written, and am informed that for that reason, and because it inculcates Whig principles, it is by many imputed to you. I contradicted this report, assuring my informant that had it been yours, I must have known it, for that you have bound yourself to make me your father-confessor on all such wicked occasions, and not to conceal from me even a murder, should you happen to commit one.

I will not trouble you, at present, to send me any more books with a view to my notes on Homer. I am not without hopes that Sir John Throckmorton, who is expected here from Venice in a short time, may bring me Villoisson's edition of the Odyssey. He certainly will, if he found it published, and that alone will be *instar omnium.*

Adieu, my dearest brother! Give my love to Tom, and thank him for his book, of which I believe I need not have deprived him, intending that my readers shall detect the occult instruction contained in Homer's stories for themselves.

W. C.

452. — TO LADY HESKETH.

INVITATION TO WESTON—OLD COMMONPLACE BOOKS.

WESTON, *June* 1, 1793.

MY DEAREST COUSIN, — You will not, you say, come to us now; and you tell us not when you will. These assignations *sine die* are such shadowy things, that I can neither grasp nor get any comfort from them. Know you not, that hope is the next best thing to enjoyment? Give us then a hope, and a determinate time for that hope to fix on, and we will endeavour to be satisfied.

* One of the novels of Robert Bage, born at Derby in 1728, and died at Tamworth in 1801. He was author of several works of fiction, in which he not only "inculcates Whig principles," but too frequently gives expression to sentiments that strike at the root of morality and religion. His literary merits, however, have procured him a place among the novelists whose lives have been so admirably written by Sir Walter Scott. To his memoir of Bage the reader is referred for farther information regarding him, and for an estimate of his merits as a writer of fiction.—S.

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Johnny is gone to Cambridge, called thither to take his degree, and is much missed by me. He is such an active little fellow in my service, that he cannot be otherwise. In three weeks, however, I shall hope to have him again for a fortnight. I have had a letter from him, containing an incident which has given birth to the following:

TO A YOUNG FRIEND, ON HIS ARRIVAL AT CAMBRIDGE WET, WHEN NO RAIN HAD FALLEN THERE.

If Gideon's fleece, which drench'd with dew he found,
While moisture none refresh'd the herbs around,
Might fitly represent the Church, endow'd
With heav'nly gifts, to heathens not allow'd;
In pledge, perhaps, of favours from on high,
Thy locks were wet when other locks were dry.
Heaven grant us half the omen—may we see
Not drought on others, but much dew on thee!

These are spick and span. Johnny himself has not yet seen them. By the way, he has filled your book completely; and I will give thee a guinea if thou wilt search thy old book for a couple of songs, and two or three other pieces of which I know thou madest copies at the Vicarage, and which I have lost. The songs I know are pretty good, and I would fain recover them. W. C.

453.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

VERSES AND LETTER, CONTAINING REASONS FOR NOT ENGAGING IN A JOINT LITERARY LABOUR.

Dear architect of fine chateaux in air,
Worthier to stand for ever, if they could,
Than any built of stone, or yet of wood
For back of royal elephant to bear.
Oh! for permission from the skies to share
Much to my own, though little to thy good,
With thee (not subject to the jealous mood!)
A partnership of literary ware;
But I am bankrupt now, and doom'd henceforth
To drudge, in descant dry, on others' lays—
Bards I acknowledge of unequall'd worth!
But what is commentator's happiest praise?
That he has furnish'd lights for other eyes,
Which they who need them use, and then despise.

WESTON, *June* 29, 1793.

WHAT remains for me to say on this subject, my dear brother bard, I will say in prose. There are other impediments which I could not comprise within the bounds of a sonnet.

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My poor Mary's infirm condition makes it impossible for me, at present, to engage in a work such as you propose. My thoughts are not sufficiently free, nor have I, nor can I, by any means, find opportunity; added to which, comes a difficulty, which, though you are not at all aware of it, presents itself to me under a most forbidding appearance: Can you guess it? No, not you; neither perhaps will you be able to imagine that such a difficulty can possibly subsist. If your hair begins to bristle, stroke it down again, for there is no need why it should erect itself. It concerns me, not you. I know myself too well not to know that I am nobody in verse, unless in a corner, and alone, and unconnected in my operations. This is not owing to want of love for you, my brother, or the most consummate confidence in you; for I have both in a degree that has not been exceeded in the experience of any friend you have, or ever had. But I am so made up: I will not enter into a metaphysical analysis of my strange composition, in order to detect the true cause of this evil; but on a general view of the matter, I suspect that it proceeds from that shyness, which has been my effectual and almost fatal hinderance on many other important occasions; and which I should feel, I well know, on this, to a degree that would perfectly cripple me. No! I shall neither do, nor attempt any thing of consequence more, unless my poor Mary get better; nor even then, unless it should please God to give me another nature, in concert with any man—I could not even with my own father or brother, were they now alive. Small game must serve me at present, and till I have done with Homer and Milton, a sonnet or some such matter must content me. The utmost that I aspire to, and Heaven knows with how feeble a hope, is to write at some better opportunity, and when my hands are free, *The Four Ages*. Thus I have opened my heart unto thee. W. C.

454.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

COWPER CONSENTS TO A LITERARY PARTNERSHIP.

WESTON, *July* 7, 1793.

MY DEAREST HAYLEY,—If the excessive heat of this day, which forbids me to do any thing else, will permit me to scribble to you, I shall rejoice. To do this is a pleasure to me at all times, but to do it now, a double one; because I am in haste to tell you how much I am delighted with your

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projected quadruple alliance, and to assure you, that if it please God to afford me health, spirits, ability, and leisure, I will not fail to devote them all to the production of my quota, *The Four Ages.*

You are very kind to humour me as you do, and had need be a little touched yourself with all my oddities, that you may know how to administer to mine. All whom I love do so, and I believe it to be impossible to love heartily those who do not. People must not do me good in *their* way, but in my *own*, and then they do me good indeed. My pride, my ambition, and my friendship for you, and the interest I take in my own dear self, will all be consulted and gratified by an arm-in-arm appearance with you in public; and I shall work with more zeal and assiduity at Homer, and, when Homer is finished, at Milton, with the prospect of such a coalition before me. But what shall I do with a multitude of small pieces, from which I intended to select the best, and adding them to *The Four Ages*, to have made a volume? Will there be room for them upon your plan? I have retouched them, and will retouch them again. Some of them will suggest pretty devices to a designer, and in short, I have a desire not to lose them.*

I am at this moment, with all the imprudence natural to poets, expending nobody knows what, in embellishing my premises, or rather the premises of my neighbour Courtenay, which is more poetical still. I have built one summer-house already, with the boards of my old study, and am building another spick and span as they say. I have also a stone-cutter now at work, setting a bust of my dear old Grecian on a pedestal; and besides all this, I meditate still more that is to be done in the autumn. Your project, therefore, is most opportune, as any project must needs be that has so direct a tendency to put money into the pocket of one so likely to want it.

> Ah, brother poet! send me of your shade,
> And bid the Zephyrs hasten to my aid!
> Or, like a worm unearth'd at noon, I go,
> Despatch'd by sunshine, to the shades below.

My poor Mary is as well as the heat will allow her to be, and whether it be cold or sultry, is always affectionately mindful of you and yours. W. C.

* For some account of this proposed literary alliance, see Life.

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455—TO THE REV. MR GREATHEED.

REASONS FOR NOT QUITTING WESTON.

July 27, 1793.

I WAS not without some expectation of a line from you, my dear sir, though you did not promise me one at your departure; and am happy not to have been disappointed; still happier to learn that you and Mrs Greatheed are well, and so delightfully situated. Your kind offer to us of sharing with you the house which you at present inhabit, added to the short but lively description of the scenery that surrounds it, wants nothing to win our acceptance, should it please God to give Mrs Unwin a little more strength, and should I ever be master of my time so as to be able to gratify myself with what would please me most. But many have claims upon us, and some who cannot absolutely be said to have any, would yet complain, and think themselves slighted, should we prefer rocks and caves to them. In short, we are called so many ways, that these numerous demands are likely to operate as a *remora*, and to keep us fixt at home. Here we can occasionally have the pleasure of yours and Mrs Greatheed's company, and to have it here must I believe content us. Hayley in his last letter gives me reason to expect the pleasure of seeing him and his dear boy Tom in the autumn. He will use all his eloquence to draw us to Eartham again. My cousin Johnny of Norfolk holds me under a promise to make my first trip thither, and the very same promise I have hastily made to visit Sir John and Lady Throckmorton, at Bucklands. How to reconcile such clashing promises, and give satisfaction to all, would puzzle me bad I nothing else to do; and therefore, as I say, the result will probably be, that we shall find ourselves obliged to go no where, since we cannot every where.

* * * * * *

Wishing you both safe at home again, and to see you, as soon as may be, here, — I remain, affectionately yours,

W. C.

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456. — TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

HOMER'S BLINDNESS — MOTTO FOR A BUST OF HIM.

July 24, 1793.

I HAVE been vexed with myself, my dearest brother, and with every thing about me, not excepting even Homer himself, that I have been obliged so long to delay an answer to your last kind letter. If I listen any longer to calls another way, I shall hardly be able to tell you how happy we are in the hope of seeing you in the autumn, before the autumn will have arrived. Thrice welcome will you and your dear boy be to us, and the longer you will afford us your company, the more welcome. I have set up the head of Homer on a famous fine pedestal, and a very majestic appearance he makes. I am now puzzled about a motto, and wish you to decide for me between two, one of which I have composed myself, a Greek one, as follows:

Εἰκονα τις ταύτην ; ηλυτὸν ἀνέρος οὐνομ' ἴλαλεν.
Οὔνομα δ' οὗτος ἀνὴρ ἄφθιτον αἶνον ἔχει.

The other is my own translation of a passage in the Odyssey, the original of which I have seen used as a motto to an engraved head of Homer many a time.

The present edition of the lines stands thus:

Him partially the muse,
And dearly loved, yet gave him good and ill:
She quench'd his sight, but gave him strains divine.

Tell me, by the way, (if you ever had any speculations on the subject) what is it you suppose Homer to have meant in particular, when he ascribed his blindness to the muse; for that he speaks of himself under the name Demodocus in the eighth book, I believe is by all admitted. How could the old bard study himself blind, when books were either few, or none at all? And did he write his poems? If neither were the cause, as seems reasonable to imagine, how could he incur his blindness by such means as could be justly imputable to the muse? Would mere thinking blind him? I want to know;

Call up some spirit from the vasty deep!

I said to my Sam, "Sam, build me a shed in the garden, with any thing that you can find, and make it rude and

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rough like one of those at Eartham." "Yes, sir," says Sam, and straightway laying his own noddle, and the carpenter's noddle together, has built me a thing fit for Stow Gardens. Is not this vexatious?—I threaten to inscribe it thus:

Beware of building! I intended
Rough logs and thatch, and thus it ended.

But my Mary says I shall break Sam's heart, and the carpenter's too, and will not consent to it. Poor Mary sleeps but ill. How have you lived who cannot bear a sunbeam?—Adieu! my dearest Hayley. W. C.

457.—TO MRS CHARLOTTE SMITH.*

THANKS FOR A VOLUME OF HER POETRY — DEDICATION TO COWPER.

WESTON, *July* 25, 1793.

MY DEAR MADAM,—Many reasons concurred to make me impatient for the arrival of your most acceptable present, and among them was the fear lest you should, perhaps, suspect me of tardiness in acknowledging so great a favour,—a fear that, as often as it prevailed, distressed me exceedingly. At length I have received it, and my little bookseller assures me that he sent it the very day he got it; by some mistake, however, the wagon brought it instead of the coach, which occasioned a delay that I could ill afford.

It came this morning about an hour ago; consequently I have not had time to peruse the poem, though you may be sure I have found enough for the perusal of the Dedication. I have in fact given it three readings, and in each have found increasing pleasure.

I am a whimsical creature; when I write for the public, I write, of course, with a desire to please, in other words, to acquire fame, and I labour accordingly; but when I find that I have succeeded, feel myself alarmed, and ready to shrink from the acquisition.

This I have felt more than once, and when I saw my name at the head of your Dedication, I felt it again; but the consummate delicacy of your praise soon convinced me that I might spare my blushes, and that the demand was less upon my modesty than my gratitude. Of that be assured, dear

* Miss Turner, afterwards Mrs Smith, by her marriage to a West Indian merchant, was born 1749, in Sussex, and died in 1806. Her reputation as a writer of fiction stood high in her day. The work here alluded to is the tale of the "Emigrants," dedicated to Cowper

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madam, and of the truest esteem and respect of your most obliged and affectionate humble servant, W. C.

P. S. I should have been much grieved to have let slip this opportunity of thanking you for your charming sonnets, and my two most agreeable old friends Monimia and Orlando.

458. — TO LADY HESKETH.

DOMESTIC INCIDENTS.

WESTON, *August* 11, 1793.

MY DEAREST COUSIN. — I am glad that my poor and hasty attempts to express some little civility to Miss Fanshaw, and the amiable Count, have your and her approbation.* The

* The little incident to which reference is made in the beginning of this letter arose out of the following circumstance. Lady Hesketh had lent to Miss Fanshaw an unpublished poem by Cowper, on condition that "she should neither shew it nor take a copy." Miss Fanshaw returned the manuscript with these lines:—

What wonder if my wavering hand
Had dared to disobey,
When Hesketh gave a harsh command,
And Cowper led astray?

Then take this tempting gift of thine,
By pen uncopied yet;
But, can'st thou memory confine,
Or teach me to forget?

More lasting than the touch of art
The characters remain,
When written by a feeling heart
On tablets of the brain.

To these verses Cowper's "poor and hasty" reply ran as follows: —

To be remember'd thus is fame,
And in the first degree;
And did the few, like her, the same,
The press might rest for me.

So Homer, in the memory stored
Of many a Grecian belle,
Was once preserved — a richer hoard,
But never lodged so well.

The "amiable Count" was Gravina, the Spanish admiral, who having translated the poem of the *Rose* into Italian, received this graceful compliment from its author,—

My Rose, Gravina, blooms anew,
And, steep'd not now in rain,
But in Castalian streams by you,
Will never fade again.

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lines addressed to her were not what I would have made them; but lack of time — a lack which always presses me — would not suffer me to improve them. Many thanks for her letter, which, were my merits less the subject of it, I should without scruple say is an excellent one. She writes with the force and accuracy of a person skilled in more languages than are spoken in the present day, as I doubt not that she is. I perfectly approve the theme she recommends to me, but am at present so totally absorbed in Homer, that all I do beside is ill done, being hurried over; and I would not execute ill a subject of her recommending.

I shall watch the walnuts with more attention than they who eat them, which I do in some hope, though you do not expressly say so, that when their threshing time arrives, we shall see you here. I am now going to paper my new study, and in a short time it will be fit to inhabit.

Lady Spencer has sent me a present from Rome, by the hands of Sir John Throckmorton, — engravings of Odyssey subjects, after figures by Flaxman, a statuary, at present resident there, of high repute, and much a friend of Hayley's.

Thou livest, my dear, I acknowledge, in a very fine country, but they have spoiled it by building London in it. — Adieu,

W. C.

459. — TO WILLIAM HAYLEY.

FLAXMAN'S ILLUSTRATIONS OF HOMER.

WESTON, *August* 15, 1793.

Instead of a pound or two, spending a mint
Must serve me at least, I believe, with a hint,
That building, and building, a man may be driven
At last out of doors, and have no house to live in.

BESIDES, my dearest brother, they have not only built for me what I did not want, but have ruined a notable tetrastic by doing so.* I had written one which I designed for a hermitage, and it will by no means suit the fine and pompous affair which they have made instead of one. So that as a

* The "tetrastic" was the following

INSCRIPTION FOR AN HERMITAGE IN THE AUTHOR'S GARDEN.

This cabin, Mary, in my sight appears,
Built as it has been in our waning years,
A rest afforded to our weary feet,
Preliminary to the last retreat.

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poet I am every way afflicted, — made poorer than I need have been, and robbed of my verses; what case can be more deplorable?

You must not suppose me ignorant of what Flaxman has done, or that I have not seen it, or that I am not actually in possession of it, at least of the engravings which you mention. In fact, I have had them more than a fortnight. Lady Dowager Spencer, to whom I inscribed my Odyssey, and who was at Rome when Sir John Throckmorton was there, charged him with them as a present to me, and arriving here lately, he executed his commission. Romney, I doubt not, is right in his judgment of them; he is an artist himself, and cannot easily be mistaken; and I take his opinion as an oracle, the rather because it coincides exactly with my own. The figures are highly classical, antique, and elegant; especially that of Penelope, who, whether she wakes or sleeps, must necessarily charm all beholders.*

Your scheme of embellishing my Odyssey with these plates is a kind one, and the fruit of your benevolence to me; but Johnson, I fear, will hardly stake so much money as the cost would amount to, on a work the fate of which is at present uncertain. Nor could we adorn the Odyssey in this splendid manner, unless we had similar ornaments to bestow on the Iliad. Such, I presume, are not ready, and much time must elapse, even if Flaxman should accede to the plan, before he could possibly prepare them. Happy indeed should I be, to see a work of mine so nobly accompanied; but should that good fortune ever attend me, it cannot take place till the third or fourth edition shall afford the occasion. This I regret, and I regret, too, that you will have seen them before I can have an opportunity to shew them to you. Here is sixpence for you if you will abstain from the sight of them while you are in London.

> The sculptor?— Nameless, though once dear to fame;
> But this man bears an everlasting name.†

So I purpose it shall stand; and on the pedestal, when you

* John Flaxman, R.A. born at York, 1755, died at London, 1826: a most amiable man, and one of the ablest sculptors in the history of modern art. The Illustrations of Homer mentioned in the text, are in outline, and, together with similar compositions from Dante, Æschylus, and Hesiod, spread the artist's reputation over Europe, identifying his fame with the regeneration of art. Were the question asked, Where is most expression and most beauty to be found with the least intrusion of labour and the greatest ease? we should answer, in Flaxman's outlines.

† A translation of Cowper's Greek verses on his bust of Homer

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come, in that form you will find it. The added line from the Odyssey is charming, but the assumption of sonship to Homer seems too daring; suppose it stood thus,

Ὡς δὲ πατὴς ᾧ παιρὶ, καὶ οὔποτε λήσομαι αὐτοῦ.

I am not sure that this would be clear of the same objection, and it departs from the text still more.

With my poor Mary's best love, and our united wishes to see you here, I remain, my dearest brother, ever yours,

W. C.

460. — TO MRS COURTENAY.

A RUSTIC ENTERTAINMENT — TREATMENT OF BOB ARCHER BY A ROGUISH FIDDLER.

WESTON, *August* 20, 1793.

MY dearest Catharina is too reasonable, I know, to expect news from me, who live on the outside of the world, and know nothing that passes within it. The best news is, that though you are gone, you are not gone for ever, as once I supposed you were, and said that we should probably meet no more. Some news, however, we have; but then I conclude that you have already received it from the Doctor, and that thought almost deprives me of all courage to relate it. On the evening of the feast, Bob Archer's house affording, I suppose, the best room for the purpose, all the lads and lasses, who felt themselves disposed to dance, assembled there. Long time they danced, at least long time they did something a little like it; when at last, the company having retired, the fiddler asked Bob for a lodging. Bob replied, "that his beds were all full of his own family; but, if he chose it, he would shew him a haycock, where he might sleep as sound as in any bed whatever." So forth they went together, and when they reached the place, the fiddler knocked down Bob, and demanded his money. But, happily for Bob, though he might be knocked down, and actually was so, yet he could not possibly be robbed, having nothing. The fiddler, therefore, having amused himself with kicking him and beating him as he lay, as long as he saw good, left him, and has never been heard of since, nor inquired after indeed, being, no doubt, the last man in the world whom Bob wishes to see again.

By a letter from Hayley to-day I learn, that Flaxman, to whom we are indebted for those Odyssey figures which Lady Frog brought over, has almost finished a set for the Iliad also. I should be glad to embellish my Homer with them, but

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neither my bookseller nor I shall probably choose to risk so expensive an ornament on a work, whose reception with the public is at present doubtful.

Adieu, my dearest Catharina. Give my best love to your husband. Come home as soon as you can, and accept our united very best wishes. W. C.

461. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

HIS TIME OF STUDY — COMMENTARY ON HOMER.

WESTON, *August* 22, 1793.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — I rejoice that you have had so pleasant an excursion, and have beheld so many beautiful scenes. Except the delightful Upway I have seen them all. I have lived much at Southampton, have slept and caught a sore throat at Lyndhurst, and have swum in the bay of Weymouth.* It will give us great pleasure to see you here, should your business give you an opportunity to finish your excursions of this season with one to Weston.

As for my going on, it is much as usual. I rise at six,—an industrious and wholesome practice, from which I have never swerved since March. I breakfast generally about eleven — have given the intermediate time to my old delightful bard. Villoisson no longer keeps me company. I therefore now jog along with Clarke and Barnes† at my elbow, and from the excellent annotations of the former select such as I think likely to be useful, or that recommend themselves by the amusement they may afford, of which sorts there are not a few. Barnes also affords me some of both kinds, but not so many, his notes being chiefly paraphrastical or grammatical. My only fear is lest between them both I should make my work too voluminous. W. C.

* For the best account of the splendid scenery about Southampton and the New Forest, see Gilpin's *Forest Scenery*, edited by Sir Thomas Dick Lauder.

† Joshua Barnes, born in London 1654, died, professor of Greek at Cambridge, in 1712; a learned man, a commentator and original author, but as his opponents said "felicis memoriæ, judicium expectans," of retentive memory, but lacking judgment.

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462.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

HOMER'S BLINDNESS — LORD MANSFIELD'S MONUMENT BY FLAXMAN.

WESTON, *August* 27, 1793.

I THANK you, my dear brother, for consulting the Gibbonian oracle on the question concerning Homer's muse, and his blindness. I proposed it likewise to my little neighbour Buchanan, who gave me precisely the same answer. I felt an insatiable thirst to learn something new concerning him, and despairing of information from others, was willing to hope that I had stumbled on matter unnoticed by the commentators, and might perhaps acquire a little intelligence from himself; but the great and the little oracle together have extinguished that hope, and I despair now of making any curious discoveries about him.*

Since Flaxman (which I did not know till your letter told me so) has been at work for the Iliad, as well as the Odyssey, it seems a great pity, that the engravings should not be bound up with some Homer or other; and, as I said before, I should have been too proud to have bound them up in mine. But there is an objection, at least such it seems to me, that threatens to disqualify them for such a use,—namely, the shape and size of them, which are such, that no book of the usual form could possibly receive them, save in a folded state, which I apprehend would be to murder them.

The monument of Lord Mansfield, for which you say he is engaged, will, I dare say, prove a noble effort of genius.† Statuaries, as I have heard an eminent one say, do not much trouble themselves about a likeness: else I would give much to be able to communicate to Flaxman the perfect idea that I have of the subject, such as he was forty years ago. He was at that time wonderfully handsome, and would expound the most mysterious intricacies of the law, or recapitulate both

* Referring to the celebrated question in classical literature, whether Homer was blind; a subject which, after much discussion, as a literary problem, remains where it did in the time of Aristotle, though, from the material evidence of his poems, it is certain that these could have been written only by one who had ocularly and long conversed with nature.

† This was Flaxman's first work on returning from Italy, and established his fame as second, if second, only to Canova. In the figure of Lord Mansfield, calm, simple, dignified, and severe, he has realized all that Cowper here expresses. The allegorical figures of Wisdom and Justice are much as other allegorical figures; but there is grandeur and expression in the condemned youth.

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matter and evidence of a cause, as long as from hence to Eartham, with an intelligent smile on his features, that bespoke plainly the perfect ease with which he did it. The most abstruse studies, I believe, never cost him any labour.

You say nothing lately of your intended journey our way: yet the year is waning, and the shorter days give you a hint to lose no time unnecessarily. Lately we had the whole family at the Hall, and now we have nobody. The Throckmortons are gone into Berkshire, and the Courtenays into Yorkshire. They are so pleasant a family, that I heartily wish you to see them; and at the same time wish to see you before they return, which will not be sooner than October. How shall I reconcile these wishes seemingly opposite? Why, by wishing that you may come soon and stay long: I know no other way of doing it.

My poor Mary is much as usual. I have set up Homer's head, and inscribed the pedestal; my own Greek at the top, with your translation under it, and

Ὡς δὲ παῖς ᾧ πατρὶ, &c.

It makes altogether a very smart and learned appearance.

W. C.

463. — TO LADY HESKETH.

INVITATION TO WESTON.

August 29, 1793.

Your question, at what time your coming to us will be most agreeable, is a knotty one, and such as, had I the wisdom of Solomon, I should be puzzled to answer. I will, therefore, leave it still a question, and refer the time of your journey Westonward entirely to your own election; adding this one limitation, however, that I do not wish to see you exactly at present, on account of the unfinished state of my study, the wainscot of which still smells of paint, and which is not yet papered. But to return: as I have insinuated, thy pleasant company is the thing which I always wish, and as much at one time as at another. I believe, if I examine myself minutely, since I despair of ever having it in the height of summer, which for your sake I should desire most, the depth of the winter is the season which would be most eligible to me. For then it is that, in general, I have most need of a cordial, and particularly in the month of January. I am sorry, however, that I have departed so far from my first purpose, and am answering a question which I declared myself unable to answer. Choose thy own time, secure of

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this, that whatever time that be, it will always to us be a welcome one.

I thank you for your pleasant extract of Miss Fanshaw's letter:

> Her pen drops eloquence as sweet
> As any muse's tongue can speak;
> Nor need a scribe, like her, regret
> Her want of Latin or of Greek.

And now, my dear, adieu! I have done more than I expected, and begin to feel myself exhausted with so much scribbling at the end of four hours close application to study.

W. C.

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464.—TO THE REV. JOHN JOHNSON.*

THANKS FOR A SUN DIAL, AND NOTE ON HIS TAKING ORDERS.

WESTON, *April* 11, 1793.

MY DEAREST JOHNNY,—To do a kind thing, and in a kind manner, is a double kindness, and no man is more addicted to both than you, or more skilful in contriving them. Your plan to surprise me agreeably succeeded to admiration. It was only the day before yesterday that, while we walked after dinner in the orchard, Mrs Unwin between Sam and me, hearing the hall-clock, I observed a great difference

* Mr Johnson had taken orders in August. The following characteristic letter from Cowper's *Private Correspondence* refers to that event:—

"TO THE REV. JOHN JOHNSON.

"MY DEAREST JOHNNY,—The Bishop of Norwich has won my heart by his kind and liberal behaviour to you, and if I knew him, I would tell him so. I am glad that your auditors find your voice strong, and your utterance distinct; glad, too, that your doctrine has hitherto made you no enemies. You have a gracious Master, who, it seems, will not suffer you to see war in the beginning. It will be a wonder, however, if you do not, sooner or later, find out that sore place in every heart, which can ill endure the touch of apostolic doctrine. Somebody will smart in his conscience, and you will hear of it. I say not this, my dear Johnny, to terrify, but to prepare you for that which is likely to happen, and which, troublesome as it may prove, is yet devoutly to be wished; for in general, there is little good done by preachers till the world begins to abuse them. But understand me aright,—I do not mean that you should give them unnecessary provocation by scolding and railing at them, as some, more zealous than wise, are apt to do. That were to deserve their anger. No; there is no need of it. The self-abasing doctrines of the gospel will of themselves create you enemies: but remember this for your comfort, they will also, in due time, transform them into friends, and make them love you as if they were your own children. God give you many such; as, if you are faithful to his cause, I trust he will!"

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between that and ours, and began immediately to lament, as I had often done, that there was not a sun-dial in all Weston to ascertain the true time for us. My complaint was long, and lasted till, having turned into the grass walk, we reached the new building at the end of it, where we sat awhile and reposed ourselves. In a few minutes we returned by the way we came, when what think you was my astonishment to see what I had not seen before, though I had passed close by it, a smart sun-dial mounted on a smart stone pedestal! I assure you it seemed the effect of conjuration. I stopped short, and exclaimed,—"Why, here is a sun-dial, and upon our ground! How is this? Tell me, Sam, how it came here? Do you know any thing about it?" At first I really thought (that is to say, as soon as I could think at all) that this factotum of mine, Sam Roberts, having often heard me deplore the want of one, had given orders for the supply of that want himself, without my knowledge, and was half pleased and half offended. But he soon exculpated himself by imputing the fact to you. It was brought up to Weston, it seems, about noon; but Andrews stopped the cart at the blacksmith's, whence he sent to inquire if I was gone for my walk. As it happened, I walked not till two o'clock. So there it stood waiting till I should go forth, and was introduced before my return. Fortunately, too, I went out at the church end of the village, and consequently saw nothing of it. How I could possibly pass it without seeing it, when it stood in the walk, I know not, but certain it is that I did. And where I shall fix it now, I know as little. It cannot stand between the two gates, the place of your choice, as I understand from Samuel, because the hay-cart must pass that way in the season. But we are now busy in winding the walk all round the orchard, and in doing so shall doubtless stumble at last upon some open spot that will suit it.

There it shall stand, while I live, a constant monument of your kindness.

I have this moment finished the twelfth book of the Odyssey; and I read the Iliad to Mrs Unwin every evening.

The effect of this reading is, that I still spy blemishes, something at least that I can mend; so that, after all, the transcript of alterations, which you and George have made, will not be a perfect one. It would be foolish to forego an opportunity of improvement for such a reason: neither will I. It is ten o'clock, and I must breakfast. Adieu, therefore, my dear Johnny! Remember your appointment to see us in October.—Ever yours, W. C.

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465.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

COWPER'S MELANCHOLY — FLAXMAN'S PENELOPE — EPIGRAM.

WESTON, *September* 8, 1793.

Non sum quod simulo, my dearest brother! I seem cheerful upon paper sometimes, when I am absolutely the most dejected of all creatures. Desirous, however, to gain something myself by my own letters, unprofitable as they may and must be to my friends, I keep melancholy out of them as much as I can, that I may if possible, by assuming a less gloomy air, deceive myself, and, by feigning with a continuance, improve the fiction into reality.

So you have seen Flaxman's figures, which I intended you should not have seen till I had spread them before you. How did you dare to look at them? You should have covered your eyes with both hands. I am charmed with Flaxman's Penelope, and though you don't deserve that I should, will send you a few lines, such as they are, with which she inspired me the other day while I was taking my noonday walk.

FLAXMAN'S PENELOPE.

The suitors sinn'd, but with a fair excuse,
Whom all this elegance might well seduce;
Nor can our censure on the husband fall,
Who, for a wife so lovely, slew them all.

I know not that you will meet any body here, when we see you in October, unless perhaps my Johnny should happen to be with us. If Tom is charmed with the thoughts of coming to Weston, we are equally so with the thoughts of seeing him here. At his years I should hardly hope to make his visit agreeable to him, did I not know that he is of a temper and disposition that must make him happy every where. Give our love to him. If Romney can come with you, we have both room to receive him, and hearts to make him most welcome.

W. C.

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466. — TO MRS COURTENAY.

INVITATION TO RETURN TO WESTON — FAMILY MATTERS.

September 15, 1793.

A THOUSAND thanks, my dearest Catharina, for your pleasant letter; one of the pleasantest that I have received since your departure. You are very good to apologize for your delay, but I had not flattered myself with the hopes of a speedier answer. Knowing full well your talents for entertaining your friends who are present, I was sure you would with difficulty find half an hour that you could devote to an absent one.

I am glad that you think of your return. Poor Weston is a desolation without you. In the meantime, I amuse myself as well as I can, thrumming old Homer's lyre, and turning the premises upside down. Upside down, indeed, for so it is literally that I have been dealing with the orchard, almost ever since you went, digging and delving it around to make a new walk, which now begins to assume the shape of one, and to look as if some time or other it may serve in that capacity. Taking my usual exercise there the other day with Mrs Unwin, a wide disagreement between your clock and ours occasioned me to complain much, as I have often done, of the want of a dial. Guess my surprise, when at the close of my complaint I saw one—saw one close at my side; a smart one, glittering in the sun, and mounted on a pedestal of stone. I was astonished. "This," I exclaimed, "is absolute conjuration!" It was a most mysterious affair; but the mystery was at last explained.

This scribble, I presume, will find you just arrived at Bucklands. I would, with all my heart, that since dials can be thus suddenly conjured from one place to another, I could be so too, and could start up before your eyes in the middle of some walk or lawn, where you and Lady Frog are wandering.

While Pitcairne whistles for his family estate in Fifeshire, he will do well if he will sound a few notes for me. I am originally of the same shire, and a family of my name is still there, to whom, perhaps, he may whistle on my behalf not altogether in vain. So shall his fife excel all my poetical efforts, which have not yet, and I dare say never will, effectually charm one acre of ground into my possession.

Remember me to Sir John, Lady Frog, and your husband —tell them I love them all. She told me once she was

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jealous; now, indeed, she seems to have some reason, since to her I have not written, and have written twice to you. But bid her be of good courage, in due time I will give her proof of my constancy. W. C.

467. — TO THE REV. JOHN JOHNSON.

IDLE VISITS.

WESTON, *September* 29, 1793.

MY DEAREST JOHNNY, — You have done well to leave off visiting, and being visited. Visits are insatiable devourers of time, and fit only for those who, if they did not that, would do nothing. The worst consequence of such departures from common practice is to be termed a singular sort of a fellow, or an odd fish; a sort of reproach that a man might be wise enough to condemn, who had not half your understanding.

I look forward with pleasure to October the eleventh, the day which I expect will be *Albo notandus lapillo*, on account of your arrival here.

Here you will meet Mr Rose, who comes on the eighth, and brings with him Mr Lawrence,* the painter, you may guess for what purpose. Lawrence returns when he has made his copy of me, but Mr Rose will remain perhaps as long as you will. Hayley, on the contrary, will come, I suppose, just in time not to see you. Him we expect on the twentieth. I trust, however, that thou wilt so order thy pastoral matters, as to make thy stay here as long as possible.

Lady Hesketh, in her last letter, inquires very kindly after you, asks me for your address, and purposes soon to write to you. We hope to see her in November; so that, after a summer without company, we are likely to have an autumn and a winter sociable enough. W. C.

* Sir Thomas Lawrence, P.R.A. born at Bristol, 1769, died in London, 1830; the most graceful of British artists.

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468.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

IMPERTINENT CORRESPONDENTS — LIFE OF MILTON.

WESTON, *October* 5, 1793.

MY good intentions towards you, my dearest brother, are continually frustrated; and which is most provoking, not by such engagements and avocations as have a right to my attention, such as those to my Mary, and to the old bard of Greece, but by mere impertinencies, such as calls of civility from persons not very interesting to me, and letters from a distance still less interesting, because the writers of them are strangers. A man sent me a long copy of verses, which I could do no less than acknowledge. They were silly enough, and cost me eighteenpence, which was seventeen pence halfpenny farthing more than they were worth. Another sent me at the same time a plan, requesting my opinion of it, and that I would lend him my name as editor; a request with which I shall not comply, but I am obliged to tell him so, and one letter is all that I have time to despatch in a day, sometimes half a one, and sometimes I am not able to write at all. Thus it is that my time perishes, and I can neither give so much of it as I would to you or to any other valuable purpose.

On Tuesday we expect company. Mr Rose and Lawrence the painter. Yet once more is my patience to be exercised, and once more I am made to wish that my face had been moveable, to put on and take off at pleasure, so as to be portable in a bandbox, and sent to the artist. These, however, will be gone, as I believe I told you, before you arrive, at which time I know not that any body will be here, except my Johnny, whose presence will not at all interfere with our readings. You will not, I believe, find me a very slashing critic: I hardly indeed expect to find any thing in your Life of Milton that I shall sentence to amputation. How should it be too long? A well written work, sensible and spirited, such as yours was, when I saw it, is never so. But, however, we shall see. I promise to spare nothing that I think may be lopped off with advantage.

I began this letter yesterday, but could not finish it till now. I have risen this morning, like an infernal frog out of Acheron, covered with the ooze and mud of melancholy. For this reason I am not sorry to find myself at the bottom of my paper, for had I more room, perhaps I might fill it all with croaking, and

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make an heartache at Eartham, which I wish to be always cheerful. Adieu. My poor sympathizing Mary is of course sad, but always mindful of you. W. C.

469.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

INVITATION TO WESTON.

October 18, 1793.

My dear Brother,—I have not at present much that is necessary to say here, because I shall have the happiness of seeing you so soon; my time, according to custom, is a mere scrap, for which reason such must be my letter also.

You will find here more than I have hitherto given you reason to expect, but none who will not be happy to see you. These however stay with us but a short time, and will leave us in full possession of Weston on Wednesday next.

I look forward with joy to your coming, heartily wishing you a pleasant journey, in which my poor Mary joins me. Give our best love to Tom; without whom, after having been taught to look for him, we should feel our pleasure in the interview much diminished.

Læti expectamus te puerumque tuum.

W. C.*

470.—TO THE REV. J. JEKYLL RYE.

MR HURDIS—MORTUARY VERSES.

Weston, *November* 3, 1793.

My dear Sir,—Sensible as I am of your kindness in taking such a journey, at no very pleasant season, merely to serve a friend of mine, I cannot allow my thanks to sleep till I may have the pleasure of seeing you. I hope never to shew myself unmindful of so great a favour. Two lines which I received yesterday from Mr Hurdis, written hastily on the day of decision, informed me that it was made in his favour, and by a majority of twenty.† I have great satisfaction in

* "My visit," says Hayley, "took place early in November. I found Cowper apparently well and enlivened by the society of his young kinsman from Norfolk, and another of his favourite friends, Mr Rose."

† Professorship of poetry at Oxford.

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the event, and consequently hold myself indebted to all who at my instance have contributed to it.

You may depend on me for due attention to the honest clerk's request. When he called, it was not possible that I should answer your obliging letter; for he arrived here very early, and if I suffered any thing to interfere with my morning studies, I should never accomplish my labours. Your hint concerning the subject for this year's copy is a very good one, and shall not be neglected.—I remain sincerely yours, W. C.

471.—TO MRS COURTENAY.

HIS OCCUPATIONS WITH MR HAYLEY AT WESTON.

WESTON, *November* 4, 1793.

I SELDOM rejoice in a day of soaking rain like this; but in this, my dearest Catharina, I do rejoice sincerely, because it affords me an opportunity of writing to you, which if fair weather had invited us into the orchard walk at the usual hour, I should not easily have found. I am a most busy man, busy to a degree that sometimes half distracts me; but if complete distraction be occasioned by having the thoughts too much and too long attached to a single point, I am in no danger of it, with such a perpetual whirl are mine whisked about from one subject to another. When two poets meet, there are fine doings I can assure you. My Homer finds work for Hayley, and his Life of Milton work for me, so that we are neither of us one moment idle. Poor Mrs Unwin in the meantime sits quiet in her corner, occasionally laughing at us both, and not seldom interrupting us with some question or remark, for which she is constantly rewarded by me with a "Hush—hold your peace!" Bless yourself, my dear Catharina, that you are not connected with a poet, especially that you have not two to deal with; ladies who have, may be bidden indeed to hold their peace, but very little peace have they. How should they in fact have any, continually enjoined as they are to be silent?

* * * * * * * *

The same fever that has been so epidemic there, has been severely felt here likewise; some have died, and a multitude have been in danger. Two under our own roof have been infected with it, and I am not sure that I have perfectly escaped myself, but I am now well again.

I have persuaded Hayley to stay a week longer, and again

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my hopes revive, that he may yet have an opportunity to know my friends before he returns into Sussex.* I write amidst a chaos of interruptions: Hayley, on the one hand, spouts Greek, and, on the other hand, Mrs Unwin continues talking, sometimes to us, and sometimes, because we are both too busy to attend to her, she holds a dialogue with herself. Query, is not this a bull; and ought I not instead of dialogue to have said soliloquy?

Adieu! With our united love to all your party, and with ardent wishes soon to see you all at Weston, I remain, my dearest Catharina, ever yours, W. C.

472.—TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

SCENERY AT WESTON.

WESTON, *November* 5, 1793.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—In a letter from Lady Hesketh, which I received not long since, she informed me how very pleasantly she had spent some time at Wargrove.† We now begin to expect her here, where our charms of situation are, perhaps, not equal to yours, yet by no means contemptible. She told me she had spoken to you in very handsome terms of the country round about us, but not so of our house, and the view before it. The house istelf, however, is not unworthy some commendation; small as it is, it is neat, and neater than she is aware of; for my study and the room over it have been repaired and beautified this summer, and little more was wanting to make it an abode sufficiently commodious for a man of my moderate desires. As to the prospect from it, that she misrepresented strangely, as I hope soon to have an opportunity to convince her by ocular demonstration. She told you, I know, of certain cottages opposite to us, or rather she described them as poor houses and hovels that effectually blind our windows. But none such exist. On the contrary, the opposite object, and the only one, is an orchard, so well planted, and with trees of such growth, that we seem to look into a wood, or rather to be surrounded by one. Thus, placed as we are in the midst of a village, we have none of those

* "Cowper entreated me, with great kindness, to remain the whole winter at Weston, and engage with him in a regular and complete revisal of Homer. Private considerations prevented this; and I left Weston in November."—Hayley's *Life*.

† Mr Hill's country residence.

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disagreeables that belong to such a position, and the village itself is one of the prettiest I know,—terminated at one end by the church tower, seen through trees, and at the other, by a very handsome gateway, opening into a fine grove of elms, belonging to our neighbour Courtenay. How happy should I be to shew it instead of describing it to you! Adieu, my dear friend, W. C.

473.—TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

LETTERS FROM FRIENDS NO INTERRUPTION — POLITICAL ASPECT OF EUROPE.

WESTON, *November* 10, 1793.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You are very kind to consider my literary engagements, and to make them a reason for not interrupting me more frequently with a letter; but though I am indeed as busy as an author or an editor can well be, and am not apt to be overjoyed at the arrival of letters from uninteresting quarters, I shall always, I hope, have leisure both to peruse and to answer those of my real friends, and to do both with pleasure.

I have to thank you much for your benevolent aid in the affair of my friend Hurdis. You have doubtless learned ere now, that he has succeeded, and carried the prize by a majority of twenty. He is well qualified for the post he has gained. So much the better for the honour of the Oxonian laurel, and so much the more for the credit of those who have favoured him with their suffrages.

I am entirely of your mind respecting this conflagration by which all Europe suffers at present, and is likely to suffer for a long time to come. The same mistake seems to have prevailed as in the American business. We then flattered ourselves that the colonies would prove an easy conquest; and when all the neighbouring nations armed themselves against France, we imagined, I believe, that she too would be presently vanquished. But we begin already to be undeceived, and God only knows to what a degree we may find we have erred at the conclusion. Such, however, is the state of things all around us as reminds me continually of the Psalmist's expression, "He shall break them in pieces like a potter's vessel:" And I rather wish than hope, in some of my melancholy moods, that England herself may escape a fracture. I remain truly yours, W. C.

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474.—TO THE REV. MR HURDIS.

CONGRATULATIONS ON HIS ELECTION—COWPER'S EMPLOYMENTS.

WESTON, *November* 24, 1793.

MY DEAR SIR,—Though my congratulations have been delayed, you have no friend, numerous as your friends are, who has more sincerely rejoiced in your success than I. It was no small mortification to me to find that three out of the six, whom I had engaged, were not qualified to vote. You have prevailed, however, and by a considerable majority; there is, therefore, no room left for regret. When your short note arrived which gave me the agreeable news of your victory, our friend of Eartham was with me, and shared largely in the joy that I felt on the occasion. He left me but a few days since, having spent somewhat more than a fortnight here, during which time we employed all our leisure hours in the revisal of his Life of Milton. It is now finished, and a very finished work it is, and one that will do great honour, I am persuaded, to the biographer, and the excellent man, of injured memory, who is the subject of it. As to my own concern with the works of this first of poets, which has been long a matter of burdensome contemplation, I have the happiness to find at last that I am at liberty to postpone my labours. While I expected that my commentary would be called for in the ensuing spring, I looked forward to the undertaking with dismay, not seeing a shadow of probability that I should be ready to answer the demand; for this ultimate revisal of my Homer, together with the notes, occupies completely at present, and will for some time longer, all the little leisure that I have for study—leisure which I gain at this season of the year by rising long before daylight.

You are now become a nearer neighbour, and, as your professorship, I hope, will not engross you wholly, will find an opportunity to give me your company at Weston. Let me hear from you soon; tell me how you like your new office, and whether you perform the duties of it with pleasure to yourself: with much pleasure to others you will, I doubt not, and with equal advantage. W. C.

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475. — TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

SUBJECTS FOR PAINTING FROM HOMER — HIS OWN PORTRAIT BY LAWRENCE.

WESTON, *November* 29, 1793.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — I have risen while the owls are still hooting to pursue my accustomed labours in the mine of Homer; but before I enter upon them, shall give the first moment of daylight to the purpose of thanking you for your last letter, containing many pleasant articles of intelligence, with nothing to abate the pleasantness of them, except the single circumstance that we are not likely to see you here so soon as I expected. My hope was that the first frost would bring you, and the amiable painter with you. If, however, you are prevented by the business of your respective professions, you are well prevented, and I will endeavour to be patient. When the latter was here, he mentioned one day the subject of Diomede's horses, driven under the axle of his chariot by the thunderbolt which fell at their feet, as a subject for his pencil.* It is certainly a noble one, and therefore worthy of his study and attention. It occurred to me at the moment, but I know not what it was that made me forget it again the next moment, that the horses of Achilles flying over the foss, with Patroclus and Automedon in the chariot, would be a good companion for it. Should you happen to recollect this when you next see him, you may submit it, if you please, to his consideration. I stumbled yesterday on another subject, which reminded me of said excellent artist, as likely to afford a fine opportunity to the expression that he could give it. It is found in the shooting match in the twenty-third book of the Iliad, between Meriones and Teucer. The former cuts the string with which the dove is tied to the mast-head, and sets her at liberty; the latter, standing at his side, in all the eagerness of emulation, points an arrow at the mark with his right hand, while with his left he snatches the bow from his competitor. He is a fine poetical figure, but Mr Lawrence himself must judge whether or not he promises as well for the canvass.

He does great honour to my physiognomy by his intention to get it engraved; and though I think I foresee that this

* We believe Sir Thomas Lawrence afterwards executed a picture from this description.

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private publication will grow in time into a publication of absolute publicity, I find it impossible to be dissatisfied with any thing that seems eligible both to him and you. To say the truth, when a man has once turned his mind inside out for the inspection of all who choose to inspect it, to make a secret of his face seems but little better than a self-contradiction. At the same time, however, I shall be best pleased if it be kept, according to your intentions, as a rarity.

I have lost Hayley, and begin to be uneasy at not hearing from him; tell me about him when you write.

I should be happy to have a work of mine embellished by Lawrence, and made a companion for a work of Hayley's. It is an event to which I look forward with the utmost complacence. I cannot tell you what a relief I feel it not to be pressed for Milton. W. C.

476.—TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

CRITIQUE ON THE NOVEL OF JONATHAN WILD.

WESTON, *December* 8, 1793.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—In my last I forgot to thank you for the box of books, containing also the pamphlets. We have read, that is to say, my cousin has, who reads to us in an evening, the history of Jonathan Wild, and found it highly entertaining. The satire on great men is witty, and I believe perfectly just; we have no censure to pass on it, unless that we think the character of Mrs Heartfree not well sustained—not quite delicate in the latter part of it—and that the constant effect of her charms upon every man who sees her has a sameness in it that is tiresome, and betrays either much carelessness, or idleness, or lack of invention. It is possible, indeed, that the author might intend by this circumstance a satirical glance at novelists, whose heroines are generally all bewitching; but it is a fault that he had better have noticed in another manner, and not have exemplified in his own.

The first volume of *Man as he is* has lain unread in my study window this twelvemonth, and would have been returned unread to its owner, had not my cousin come in good time to save it from that disgrace. We are now reading it, and find it excellent, abounding with wit and just sentiment, and knowledge both of books and men. Adieu!

W. C.

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477.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

EXPRESSING ANXIETY TO HEAR OF HIS LITERARY ENGAGEMENTS.

WESTON, *December* 8, 1793.

I HAVE waited, and waited impatiently, for a line from you, and am at last determined to send you one, to inquire what is become of you, and why you are silent so much longer than usual.*

I want to know many things which only you can tell me, but especially I want to know what has been the issue of your conference with Nichol. Has he seen your work? I am impatient for the appearance of it, because impatient to have the spotless credit of the great poet's character, as a man and a citizen, vindicated as it ought to be, and as it never will be again.

It is a great relief to me that my Miltonic labours are suspended. I am now busy in transcribing the alterations of Homer, having finished the whole revisal. I must then write a new Preface, which done, I shall endeavour immediately to descant on the *Four Ages*. Adieu, my dear brother,

W. C.

478.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

TRANSLATION OF HECTOR'S PRAYER — DEFENCE OF HIS OWN VERSION.

WESTON, *December* 17, 1793.

O Jove! and all ye gods! grant this my son
To prove, like me, pre-eminent in Troy!
In valour such, and firmness of command!
Be he extoll'd, when he returns from fight,
As far his sire's superior! may he slay
His enemy, bring home his gory spoils,
And may his mother's heart o'erflow with joy!

I ROSE this morning at six o'clock, on purpose to translate this prayer again, and to write to my dear brother. Here you have it, such as it is, not perfectly according to my own liking, but as well as I could make it, and, I think, better than either yours or Lord Thurlow's. You, with your six lines, have made yourself stiff and ungraceful, and he, with

* Mr Hayley had been confined by illness while in London, and prevented from executing commissions for, or writing to Cowper.

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his seven, has produced as good prose as heart can wish, but no poetry at all. A scrupulous attention to the letter has spoiled you both; you have neither the spirit nor the manner of Homer. A portion of both may be found, I believe, in my version, but not so much as I wish; it is better, however, than the printed one. His Lordship's two first lines I cannot very well understand; he seems to me to give a sense to the original that does not belong to it. Hector, I apprehend, does not say, "Grant that he may prove himself my son, and be eminent," &c.; but "grant that this my son may prove eminent;" which is a material difference. In the latter sense I find the simplicity of an ancient; in the former, that is to say, in the notion of a man proving himself his father's son by similar merit, the finesse and dexterity of a modern. His Lordship, too, makes the man, who gives the young hero his commendation, the person who returns from battle; whereas Homer makes the young hero himself that person, at least if Clarke is a just interpreter, which, I suppose, is hardly to be disputed.

If my old friend would look into my Preface, he would find a principle laid down there, which, perhaps, it would not be easy to invalidate, and which, properly attended to, would equally secure a translation from stiffness and from wildness. The principle I mean is this: "Close, but not so close as to be servile; free, but not so free as to be licentious." A superstitious fidelity loses the spirit, and a loose deviation the sense of the translated author; a happy moderation in either case is the only possible way of preserving both.

Thus have I disciplined you both; and now, if you please, you may both discipline me. I shall not enter my version in my book till it has undergone your strictures at least; and should you write to the noble critic again, you are welcome to submit it to his. We are three awkward fellows, indeed, if we cannot, amongst us, make a tolerably good translation of six lines of Homer. Adieu! W. C. *

* This and the following, the last cheerful letters ever written by Cowper, who was now fast sinking under the weight of mental depression, were occasioned by Mr Hayley having called upon Lord Thurlow in passing through London, on his return from Weston. While describing to the Chancellor the situation of his old school-fellow, the conversation naturally turned upon Cowper's version, and Thurlow objected to the lines in question as they originally stood, and each tried a new translation. These attempts Hayley transmitted to Cowper. See Life.

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479.—TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

THE SAME SUBJECT.

WESTON, *January* 5, 1794.

MY DEAR HAYLEY,—I have waited, but waited in vain, for a propitious moment, when I might give my old friend's objections the consideration they deserve; I shall at last be forced to send a vague answer, unworthy to be sent to a person accustomed, like him, to close reasoning and abstruse discussion; for I rise after ill rest, and with a frame of mind perfectly unsuited to the occasion. I sit, too, at the window, for light's sake, where I am so cold, that my pen slips out of my fingers. First, I will give you a translation *de novo* of this untranslatable prayer. It is shaped, as nearly as I could contrive, to his Lordship's ideas, but I have little hope that it will satisfy him.

> Grant, Jove, and all ye gods, that this my son
> Be, as myself have been, illustrious here!
> A valiant man! and let him reign in Troy:
> May all who witness his return from fight
> Hereafter say, He far excels his sire!
> And let him bring back gory trophies, stripp'd
> From foes slain by him, to his mother's joy!

Imlac, in Rasselas, says—I forget to whom—"You have convinced me that it is impossible to be a poet." In like manner, I might say to his Lordship, you have convinced me that it is impossible to be a translator; to be a translator, on his terms at least, is, I am sure, impossible. On his terms, I would defy Homer himself, were he alive, to translate the Paradise Lost into Greek. Yet Milton had Homer much in his eye when he composed that poem. Whereas Homer never thought of me or my translation. There are minutiæ in every language, which, transfused into another, will spoil the version. Such extreme fidelity is, in fact, unfaithful. Such close resemblance takes away all likeness. The original is elegant, easy, natural; the copy is clumsy, constrained, unnatural. To what is this owing? To the adoption of terms not congenial to your purpose, and of a context, such as no man writing an original work would make use of. Homer is every thing that a poet should be. A translation of Homer so made, will be every thing a translation of Homer should not be; because it will be written in no language

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under heaven. It will be English, and it will be Greek, and therefore it will be neither. He is the man, whoever he be, (I do not pretend to be that man myself,) he is the man best qualified as a translator of Homer, who has drenched, and steeped, and soaked himself in the effusions of his genius, till he has imbibed their colour to the bone; and who, when he is thus dyed through and through, distinguishing between what is essentially Greek, and what may be habited in English, rejects the former, and is faithful to the latter, as far as the purposes of fine poetry will permit, and no farther: this, I think, may be easily proved. Homer is every where remarkable either for ease, dignity, or energy of expression; for grandeur of conception, and a majestic flow of numbers. If we copy him so closely as to make every one of these excellent properties of his absolutely unattainable, which will certainly be the effect of too close a copy, instead of translating, we murder him. Therefore, after all that his Lordship has said, I still hold freedom to be an indispensable. Freedom, I mean, with respect to the expression; freedom so limited, as never to leave behind the *matter;* but, at the same time, indulged with a sufficient scope to secure the spirit, and as much as possible of the manner. I say as much as possible, because an English manner must differ from a Greek one, in order to be graceful, and for this there is no remedy. Can an ungraceful, awkward translation of Homer be a good one? No. But a graceful, easy, natural, faithful version of him, will not that be a good one? Yes. Allow me but this—and I insist upon it—that such a one may be produced on my principles, and can be produced on no other.

I have not had time to criticise his Lordship's other version. You know how little time I have for any thing, and can tell him so.

Adieu! my dear brother. I have now tired both you and myself; and with the love of the whole trio, remain yours ever, W. C.

Reading his Lordship's sentiments over again, I am inclined to think that in all I have said, I have only given him back the same in other terms. He disallows both the absolute *free*, and the absolute *close:* so do I; and, if I understand myself, have said so in my preface. He wishes to recommend a medium, though he will not call it so; so do I; only we express it differently. What is it then that we dispute about? My head is not good enough to-day to discover.

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480. — TO THE REV. MR BUCHANAN.

——To interpose a little ease,
Let my frail thoughts dally with false surmise!

I WILL forget for a moment, that to whomsoever I may address myself, a letter from me can no otherwise be welcome, than as a curiosity. To you, sir, I address this; urged to it by extreme penury of employment, and the desire I feel to learn something of what is doing, and has been done, at Weston, (my beloved Weston!) since I left it.

The coldness of these blasts, even in the hottest days, has been such, that, added to the irritation of the salt spray with which they are always charged, they have occasioned me an inflammation in the eyelids, which threatened a few days since to confine me entirely, but by absenting myself as much as possible from the beach, and guarding my face with an umbrella, that inconvenience is in some degree abated. My chamber commands a very near view of the ocean, and the ships at high water approach the coast so closely, that a man furnished with better eyes than mine might, I doubt not, discern the sailors from the window. No situation — at least when the weather is clear and bright — can be pleasanter; which you will easily credit, when I add, that it imparts something a little resembling pleasure even to me. Gratify me with news of Weston! If Mr Gregson, and your neighbours the Courtenays, are there, mention me to them in such terms as you see good. Tell me if my poor birds are living! I never see the herbs I used to give them without a recollection of them, and sometimes am ready to gather them, forgetting that I am not at home. Pardon this intrusion.

Mrs Unwin continues much as usual.

MUNDSLEY, *September* 5, 1795.

481. — TO LADY HESKETH.

COWPER'S DEPRESSION.

DEAR COUSIN,—You describe delightful scenes, but you describe them to one, who, if he even saw them, could receive no delight from them: who has a faint recollection, and so

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faint, as to be like an almost forgotten dream, that once he was susceptible of pleasure from such causes. The country that you have had in prospect has been always famed for its beauties; but the wretch who can derive no gratification from a view of Nature, even under the disadvantage of her most ordinary dress, will have no eyes to admire her in any.

In one day — in one minute, I should rather have said — she became an universal blank to me; and, though from a different cause, yet with an effect as difficult to remove as blindness itself.

* * * * * * * *

MUNDSLEY, *October* 13, 1798.

END OF THE LETTERS

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